



The Shannon Mighty River of Ireland

A Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020 – 2030
Reimagining the River Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway

Basis of report

This tourism masterplan was prepared by SLR Consulting, in association with TellTale, Alan Hill and AECOM, on behalf of Waterways Ireland in strategic partnership with Fáilte Ireland. The support of the executive teams of the ten Local Authorities adjoining the River Shannon and the Shannon Erne Waterway is gratefully acknowledged:

- Cavan
- Clare
- Galway
- Leitrim
- Limerick
- Longford
- Offaly
- Roscommon
- Tipperary
- Westmeath

Cruising and angling on the Shannon.
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Canoeing on the Shannon Blueway, Lough Allen canal.
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Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	Page
1.0 INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 The Masterplan Area	8
1.2 Purpose and Aims of the Tourism Masterplan	9
1.3 Strategic Context	12
1.4 The Approach and Method	13
1.4.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment	14
2.0 CONTEXT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT	16
2.1 Principles of Sustainable Tourism Development	19
2.2 Ireland's Hidden Heartlands	20
2.3 The Opportunity	21
2.4 Taking a Market-Led Approach	22
2.4.1 Overseas Market Segments	22
2.4.2 Domestic Market Segments	22
2.4.3 Expected Growth of Tourism Activity	23
3.0 THE SHANNON - WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL?	24
3.1 What is Unique about the Shannon?	26
3.2 The Vision for the Shannon	28
4.0 THEMATIC & EXPERIENTIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE SHANNON	30
4.1 Interpretation Themes and Thematic Planning	32
4.2 Three Shannon Themes	33
4.2.1 Using the Shannon Themes	34
4.3 Inspirers – Experience Development Supports	35
4.4 Recommendation: Shannon Themes & Inspirers	35
5.0 SHANNON DISCOVERY ZONES	36
5.1 Three Discovery Zones of the Shannon	38
5.2 Visitor Experience Development Framework	44
5.3 Discovery Zone1: Upper Shannon	46
5.3.1 Discovery Zone 1: What distinguishes Upper Shannon?	46
5.3.2 Management Issues: DZ1 Upper Shannon	46
5.3.3 Recommendations: DZ1 Upper Shannon Priority Projects	50
5.4 Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon	51
5.4.1 Discovery Zone 2: What distinguishes Mid Shannon?	51
5.4.2 Management Issues: DZ2 Mid Shannon	52
5.4.3 Recommendations: DZ2 Mid Shannon Priority Projects	54
5.5 Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon	58
5.5.1 Discovery Zone 3: What distinguishes Lower Shannon?	58
5.5.2 Management Issues: DZ3 Lower Shannon	62
5.5.3 Recommendations: DZ3 Lower Shannon Priority Projects	62
6.0 SHANNON: STRATEGIC INITIATIVES	64
6.1 Strategic Initiatives for the Shannon	66
6.2 Strategic Initiative 1: Communicating a Clear & Consistent Message	67
6.2.1 A Singular Vision for the Shannon	67
6.2.2 Visual Representations of Shannon	67
6.2.3 What is Interpretation?	67
6.2.4 Interpretation on the Shannon: landscape and local scales	68
6.2.5 Interpretation and Visitor Behaviour	70
6.2.6 Interpretation Methods for the Shannon	70
6.2.7 Marketing Strategy for the Shannon	70
6.2.8 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI1 Communicating a Clear Message	71
6.3 Strategic Initiative 2: Enhancing the On-Water Visitor Experience	72
6.3.1 Rejuvenation of Cruising Experience on the Shannon	73
6.3.2 Day Boating/ Riverboat/ Passenger Cruising	73
6.3.3 Marina, Berthing & Shoreside Facilities	74
6.3.4 Water-Based Activities & Adventure	74
6.3.5 Angling	74
6.3.6 Blueways Network	75
6.3.7 Tranquillity Zones	76
6.3.8 Small-Scale Accommodation	76
6.3.9 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI2 On-Water Experience	77
6.4 Strategic Initiative 3: Enhancing the Waterside Visitor Experience	78
6.4.1 Enhancing Harbourside Amenities & Infrastructure	78
6.4.2 Nature-Viewing in Shannon's Forests	80
6.4.3 Outdoor Activities in Shannon's Hinterlands	80
6.4.4 Revitalisation of Lesser Used Waterways	81
6.4.5 Reimagining Shannon's Historic Buildings & Structures	81
6.4.6 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI3 Waterside Visitor Opportunities	82
6.5 Strategic Initiative 4: Shannon Towns and Villages	83
6.5.1 Requirements of Shannon's Towns and Villages	83
6.5.2 Shannon Towns & Villages	84
6.5.3 Shannon Gateway Towns	86
6.5.4 Shannon Hub Towns	86
6.5.5 Shannon Towns and Villages	88
6.5.6 Festivals and Events	93
6.5.7 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI4 Shannon's Towns & Villages	95
6.6 Strategic Initiative 5: Protecting & Enhancing the Shannon Environment	96
6.6.1 An Ecotourism Approach across the Masterplan Area	97
6.6.2 Destination Development and Rewilding Plan to develop access to Shannon Peatlands	97
6.6.3 UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree and Environs	98
6.6.4 Biosecurity Measures for the Shannon	98
6.6.5 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI5 Enhancing the Shannon Environment	99
6.7 Strategic Initiative 6: Improving Connectivity	100
6.7.1 Encouraging Sustainable & Slow Travel	100
6.7.2 Priority Network of Walking & Cycling Trails	101
6.7.3 Public Transport Access	101
6.7.4 Improving Existing Local Link Routes	104
6.7.5 Development of a Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route	105
6.7.6 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI6 Shannon Connectivity	106
6.8 Strategic Initiative 7: Building Enterprise & Community Networks	107
6.8.1 Creating Tourism Networks	108
6.8.2 Building the Shannon Enterprise Network	108
6.8.3 Building a Shannon Community Network	110
6.8.4 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI7 Shannon Networking	111
7.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOURISM MASTERPLAN	112
7.1 Key Principles	114
7.2 Environmental Management	114
7.3 Implementation Period	115
7.4 Partnership Approach	115
7.5 Governance Structure	116
7.5.1 Membership	116
7.6 Action Plan	117
7.7 Funding and Resourcing of the Masterplan	118
7.7.1 Potential Funding Sources	118
7.7.2 Consideration of Financial / Fiscal Incentives to Stimulate Investment	118
7.8 Key Performance Indices (KPIs)	118
APPENDICES	122
Appendix 1	124
Appendix 2	137
Appendix 3	138
Appendix 4	141

DOCUMENT REFERENCES

TABLES

Table 1	Shannon: Key Issues & Opportunities	13	Table 8	Themed Experiential Concepts for All-Shannon Festivals	94
Table 2	Tourism Numbers in Ireland 2014-2018	21	Table 9	Sample Ideas for Thematic Shannon Experiences (from Thematic Consultations)	109
Table 3	Projected future Visitor Numbers to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands (to 2030)	23	Table 10	Summary of OMC Costings: Key Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) for Shannon	117
Table 4	Using the Shannon Themes to develop Experiences	34	Table 11	Potential Sources of Funding for Implementation of Masterplan	118
Table 5	Three Discovery Zones of the Shannon	39	Table 12	Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Region – Key Performance Indices (KPIs)	120
Table 6	Shannon Discovery Zones: Thematic Framework to support Tourism Experience	42			
Table 7	Interpretation and the Visitor Journey	69			

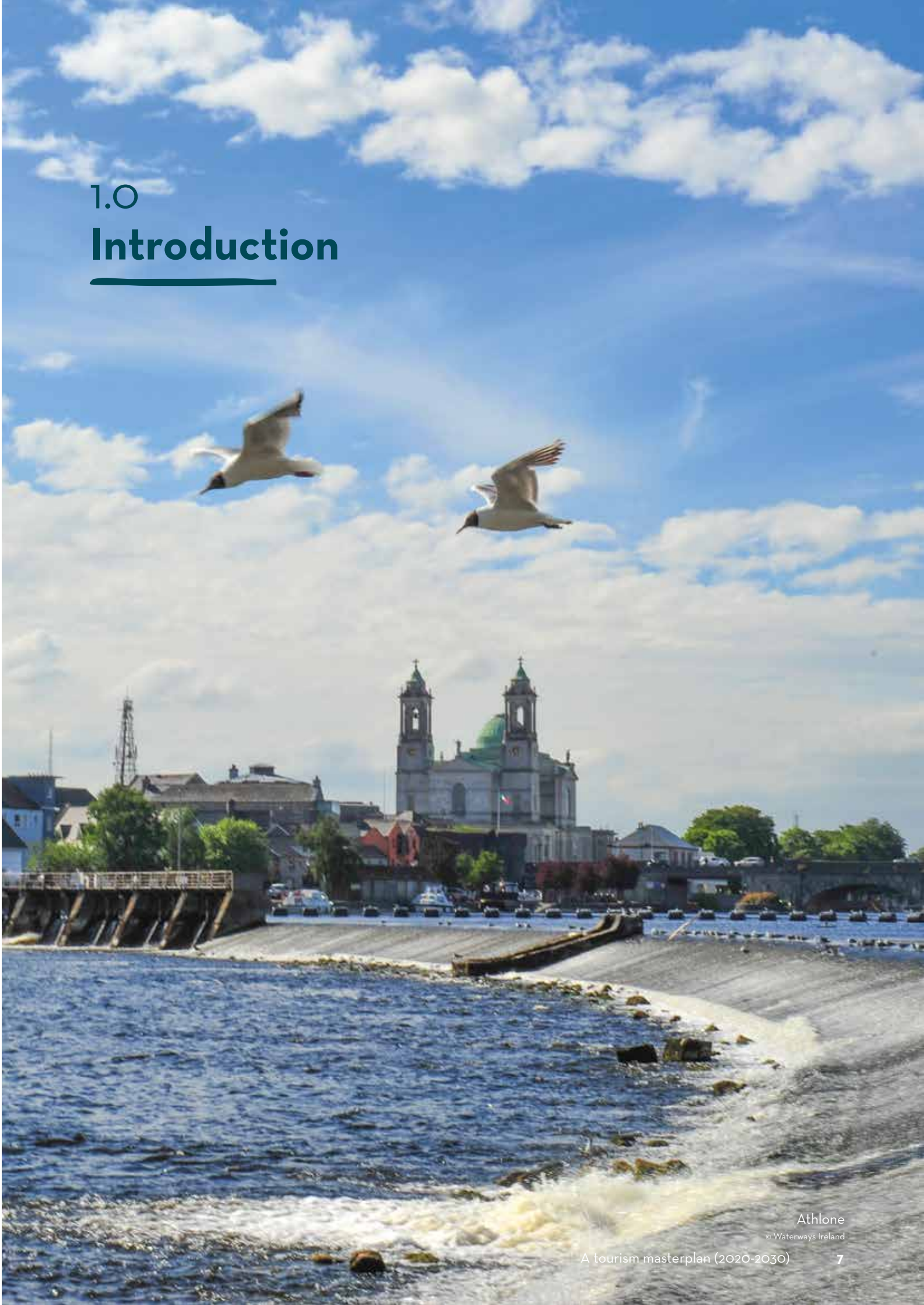
FIGURES

Figure 1	Map showing the Area of the Shannon Masterplan	10	Figure 13	Destination Pyramid for Discovery Zone 2 – Mid Shannon	53
Figure 2	The Shannon: at the core of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands	8	Figure 14	Map showing Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon	57
Figure 3	VICE Objectives for the Shannon	19	Figure 15	Destination Pyramid for Discovery Zone 3 – Lower Shannon	59
Figure 4	Multiple Ways to Interact with the Shannon	28	Figure 16	Map showing Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon	60
Figure 5	Developing a Sustainable Tourism Destination on the Shannon	29	Figure 17	Defining Strategic Initiatives for the Shannon	66
Figure 6	Creating Meaningful Experiences of the Shannon	32	Figure 18	Factors that make a Town a Quality Place	83
Figure 7	The Three Shannon Themes	33	Figure 19	Shannon Gateways, Hub Towns & Villages	85
Figure 8	The Shannon Experience Inspirers	35	Figure 20	Map of Shannon Walking & Cycling Trail Infrastructure, 2019	102
Figure 9	Three Discovery Zones on the Shannon	40	Figure 21	Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route	105
Figure 10	Visitor Experience Pyramid	44	Figure 22	Shannon Masterplan: Proposed Governance Structure	115
Figure 11	Destination Pyramid for Discovery Zone 1 – Upper Shannon	47			
Figure 12	Map showing Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon	48			

ACCOMPANYING VOLUMES TO THE TOURISM MASTERPLAN FOR THE SHANNON

Volume 1: Executive Summary	Volume 4: Environmental Report
Volume 2: The (Draft) Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 (this volume)	Volume 5: Habitats Directive Assessment
Volume 3: Baseline Report – providing baseline research to inform Vol. 2	Volume 6: SEA Statement

1.0 Introduction



Waterways Ireland, in association with Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities within the Shannon region, commissioned SLR Consulting and partners to develop a *Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon*. The objectives are to reposition the combined Shannon Navigation and Shannon Erne Waterway (collectively referred to as ‘The Shannon’) as a key tourism destination within *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands*, identifying world class visitor experiences based on the region’s natural and cultural assets. The Masterplan sets out a bold and integrated framework for sustainable tourism development along the Shannon.

1.1 The Masterplan Area

The *Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon* considers the tourism and visitor development opportunities for the entire length of the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon Erne Waterway (collectively referred to hereinafter as ‘The Shannon’), from Cavan-Leitrim southwards to Limerick City. The Shannon study area includes 5km on either side of the central navigation, forming a 10km wide corridor for consideration (see Figure 1).

While the Tourism Masterplan concerns itself with a relatively narrow geographical area, it is important to note that the Shannon sits in the core of the wider *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* tourism region and, as such, should be viewed in this wider context (Figure 2).

Figure 2 **The Shannon: at the core of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands**



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1 For ease of reference the collective term ‘Shannon’ will be used to include both the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon Erne Waterway throughout the text, except where specific references are made to each.



Glasson view, Inner Lakes, Lough Ree
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The Tourism Masterplan should be seen as one of two major plans that will unlock the tourism potential of the region, the other being the *Beara Breifne Way Tourism Activation Plan*. These two tourism plans will have a range of important overlaps and should be read with reference to one another. They will sit within the overarching *Regional Tourism Plan for Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* and will, in time, inform the preparation and implementation of a number of Visitor Experience Development Plans (or Tourism Destination Plans) throughout the region. Further information on *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* is contained in Section 2.2.

The Tourism Masterplan and supporting evidence base is set out in six volumes:

- Volume 1: Executive Summary
- **Volume 2: The Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030**
- Volume 3: Baseline Report
- Volume 4: Environmental Report
- Volume 5: Habitats Directive Assessment
- Volume 6: SEA Statement

1.2 Purpose and Aims of the Tourism Masterplan

The masterplan presents a co-ordinated strategy and development framework of scale to guide sustainable development of the Shannon as a compelling tourism destination within *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands*. It will serve as a roadmap for future tourism investment and resources, all of which should be directly aligned to the **core proposition and experience development themes** for the Shannon. It will also act as a reference document for each of the Local Authorities along the Shannon and will inform the review of County Development Plans and Tourism Strategies.

Masterplan Outcomes and Benefits

This masterplan is designed to achieve better regional spread of tourism and visitor activity, that will allow coordinated development and maximise beneficial outcomes derived from both public and private investment. This will have the combined effect of harnessing the economic and social potential of the Shannon’s natural and cultural assets in an environmentally sustainable way.

Figure 1 Map showing the Area of the Shannon Masterplan

Key

- ★ Visitor attraction
- 🚢 Cruise hire hubs
- Shannon Towns
- Shannon Villages
- Road
- Canal



- The expected **outcomes and benefits** from implementing the Masterplan are as follows:
- Growth in the visitor economy of the region through the creation of new enterprises and jobs;
 - Enhanced seasonality;
 - A better regional spread of tourism;
 - Increased vibrancy of local communities;
 - A greater awareness of the special environmental qualities of the Shannon and the protection of its environmental quality;
 - A more co-ordinated approach to the development of tourism along the Shannon;
 - An underpinning of the *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* brand by establishing the Shannon as a compelling tourism destination for both the domestic and overseas visitors.

The Shannon Tourism Masterplan sets out the unique tourism offer of the Shannon and proposes:

1. **The Destination Vision** – establish a shared view of the destination’s desired qualities and profile in the long-term, including land-based experiences and attractions that will complement water-based activities, and suggest best options to deliver on this;
2. **Products and Themes** with the most potential and offering a unique differentiator; and
3. **Recommendations on other influencing factors** that will stimulate a varied product offering and quality experience.

1.3 Strategic Context

The preparation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan seeks to support the Government’s vision for tourism: that Ireland will have a vibrant and attractive tourism sector that makes a significant contribution to employment across the country, as set out in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport’s *People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025*.

The objective of investing in, and developing, the Shannon proposition will seek to maximise tourism’s potential to support regional economic and social development.

The overall aim of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan to grow tourism in *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* also aligns strongly with national rural development policy to drive rural development through tourism. In January 2017, the Government launched *Realising our Rural Potential: An Action Plan for Rural Development*. This Action Plan sets out a framework of supports at national and local level that aims to ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life. Five pillars are set out to drive delivery:

1. Supporting Sustainable Communities;
2. Supporting Enterprise and Employment;
3. Maximising Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential;
4. Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities; and
5. Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity.

The strategic initiatives that are set out in the Shannon Masterplan will deliver on all five pillars.

In February 2018, the Government launched *Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework*, the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. The report specifically states the need for ‘*tourism development and promotional branding to ensure that areas like the Midlands and Lakelands areas are developed and promoted in such a way as to play their full part in tapping the economic potential of regional and rural areas in the region*’ (p.35).

The objective of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan is to meet these national strategic aims².

2 For further details of the policy context for tourism development, see Volume 3: Baseline Report.

1.4 The Approach and Method

- The SLR team adopted a systematic and phased approach to preparing this masterplan which involved the following stages:
- Stage 1: Data Gathering and Analysis, including best practice review³;
 - Stage 2: Stakeholder and Thematic Workshop Consultations;
 - Stage 3: Identifying the Key Issues;
 - Stage 4: Preparing the Draft Masterplan;

- Stage 5: Statutory Consultation on the Draft Masterplan, Environmental Report and HDA; and
- Stage 6: Adoption of the Masterplan.

Key Issues and Opportunities

The findings from Stages 1-3 research and consultations were assessed and a range of focal concerns were identified.

Nine key issues to be addressed by the masterplan were identified, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Shannon: Key Issues & Opportunities

No.	Key Masterplan Issues ⁴	Explanatory Comment	Potential Opportunity
1	Low visitor numbers in Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, attracting 4% of visitors and 3% of revenues, respectively.	Low visitor numbers and short dwell times in <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i> mean that investment in the Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway corridors has been disappointingly limited.	Increase the visitor numbers, dwell time and regional distribution to the Shannon, linked to <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i> ’ core strategic initiatives.
2	Uneven provision of visitor services and experiences along the Shannon	There is a significant visitor service base, concentrated around a few key towns (Carrick on Shannon, Ballyconnell, Boyle, Athlone, Portumna, Killaloe/Ballina, Limerick). With the anticipated increase in numbers, there will be critical gaps in hotel/ accommodation provision. Few of several key attractions (e.g. Clonmacnoise, Killykeen Forest Park, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Lough Key Forest Park) attract significant numbers of visitors.	Enhanced supply and range of visitor accommodation at key centres and distributed along the navigation.
3	Limited ways and locations to access ‘on-the-water’ experiences	It is challenging for visitors to take a river taxi; hire a day-boat; hire a cruise boat for a two-day weekend; or to participate spontaneously in angling, canoeing, rowing, kayaking, sailing, etc.	Opportunity exists to define easier access to a range of activities and experiences, particularly for ‘time poor’ / short break visitors.
4	Protection of nature and ecosystems of the Shannon and its hinterlands	The protection of the environment is a priority issue for all consultees, particularly environmentalists, water sports enthusiasts, anglers, boat operators and state agencies, as well as tourism operators along greenways, blueways and peatways.	Rejuvenation of the mix of Shannon cruising and boating experiences, as well as clear pointers as to where and when visitors may access a full range of vibrant on-water activities.

3 See Volume 3: Baseline Report for details.

4 See details of SWOT report in Volume 3: Baseline Report

No.	Key Masterplan Issues	Explanatory Comment	Potential Opportunity
5	A ‘permeable’ north-south region with east-west visitor throughflow	Despite the complexity and variety of the north-south rivers and lakes, most tourists simply cross at the bridges, travelling from Dublin to the west/southwest/ northwest.	The creation of compelling ‘reasons to stop and stay’ are vital for the Shannon’s future development, through attractive towns, villages, activities and attractions across the region.
6	Limited physical connectivity within Masterplan boundary area	The geography of the Shannon has prohibited the development of north-south “beside water” driving or greenway recreational routes. There is weak physical north-south connectivity along the navigation.	Improved north-south connectivity, both on- and off-water, is vital. Opportunities exist to create vibrant N-S recreational links of scale along green/blue/peatway infrastructure for enhanced connectivity. Improved north-south public transport links will also enhance tourist flows within the region.
7	Weak business networks	Many businesses are working very hard to deliver experiences, but often in isolation, lacking critical mass along the Shannon.	Creation of vibrant, active networks, among enterprises and communities to deliver an array of uniquely Shannon experiences.
8	Lack of broad public awareness of the Shannon as a single entity of scale in the Midlands, as well as a lack of consistent interpretation and messaging along it	The Shannon has lacked a singular, integrated approach to research, branding, marketing and promotion.	The provision of coherent visitor information and interpretation, with clear messaging, linked to <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’</i> brand and strategy is required.
9	Fragmented administration and governance of the Shannon as a tourism destination.	With the exception of Lough Derg, the Shannon has historically been marketed on a county-by-county basis, leading to fragmentation of effort, and a poor sense of the Shannon as a singular tourism destination.	Integrated marketing and implementation of key measures to catalyse Shannon-wide performance. Coordinated management of the Shannon as a key tourism destination.

To realise these opportunities, a series of **Strategic Initiatives** was subsequently defined as catalysts for sustainable tourism development on the Shannon over the 10-year life span of the masterplan (2020-2030).

1.4.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Waterways Ireland, as the competent authority, commissioned this Tourism Masterplan to support tourism and experience development in the Shannon Region. An Environmental Report was prepared by SLR as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Region 2020 – 2035 in accordance with the requirements of EU and national legislation on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.

The purpose of the Environmental Report is to:

- Inform the development of the Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Region;
- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Region and its reasonable alternatives;
- Improve the environmental performance of the Draft Tourism Masterplan; and
- Provide an early opportunity for the statutory authorities and the public to offer views on any aspect of the Environmental Report and accompanying Draft Tourism Masterplan, through effective consultation.

The Environmental Report complies with the requirements of the Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the SEA

Directive) as implemented in Ireland through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations (S.I. No. 435 of 2004).

The Masterplan has been developed having regard to the key features and characteristics of the masterplan area. Key environmental issues were identified as part of the SEA process, documented in the Environmental Report and addressed within the masterplan. Measures to improve the environmental performance of the masterplan have been integrated throughout the document but are also outlined in the environmental management Section (7.2).

This masterplan emphasises that subsequent tourism proposals must be consistent with the environmental commitments contained in the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies as well as the County Development Plans and Local Area Plans of the relevant local authority.

Project proposals and other proposed plans, referred to in this masterplan, will also need to take account of the requirements of relevant environmental legislation and associated EU Directives such as SEA, EIA, Birds, Habitats, Floods and Water Framework directives, as appropriate. Further information on environmental sensitivities in the plan area which will help inform the need for these assessments is available from the EPA’s Environmental Sensitivity Mapping Webtool (www.enviromap.ie).

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement

Following the adoption of the masterplan, a SEA statement was made available for inspection. In accordance with Article 16 of the regulations, this summarises:

- how environmental considerations have been integrated into the masterplan;
- how the environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 12, submissions and observations made to the competent authority in response to a notice under Article 13, and any consultations under Article 14, have been taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme;

- the reasons for choosing the masterplan in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- the measures decided upon to monitor, in accordance with Article 17, the significant environmental effects of implementation of the masterplan.

Habitats Directive Assessment

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive require that any plan or project with the potential to adversely affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site must be screened to determine if appropriate assessment of the plan or project is required. In the event the screening indicates that potential significant effects cannot be ruled out, then the plan or project will require an appropriate assessment.

SLR Consulting (SLR) was commissioned by Waterways Ireland to prepare an Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening report, a Natura Impact Report (NIR), for the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon.

The documents relating to this assessment (Volumes 5 and 5a) identify the mitigation measures proposed. As the competent authority, Waterways Ireland will be responsible for ensuring that the mitigation measures proposed are implemented fully and that the measures are implemented for the lifetime of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan.

It must also be noted that the appropriate assessment at plan level does not exempt projects or plans arising from the plan from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, when much more details of potential impacts and effects are known. In other words, projects or plans that result from the Masterplan are also required to undergo Article 6 assessment before they can proceed or be permitted. Waterways Ireland and / or the relevant planning authority will be responsible for ensuring that projects or plans that result from the Masterplan are also required to undergo Article 6 assessment before they can be permitted or proceed.

Summary of Conclusions from the Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening report

The documents relating to these assessments are included as Volumes 5 and 5a, respectively.

2.0

Context for Tourism Development



The Shannon has been a tourist destination since the Victorian period offering bathing, angling and boating to visitors. From the 1970s through to the 1990s, the Shannon product was focused mainly on coarse angling, water sports and the emerging cruise hire industry. Visitors came mainly from the UK, Germany, Belgium and France. A unique selling point was the ‘freedom to roam’ along the inland waterways on cruise hire boats, while enjoying the lakeside villages, quaint pubs and informal ‘craic’ with local people. This facilitated the development of vibrant towns and villages along the waterways, many supporting small hotels and tourism businesses.

Historically, each of the larger lakes on the Shannon corridor was marketed separately with a county-based approach to strategic tourism infrastructure. A unified vision only emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, when the Shannon became the focus of integrated tourism development by Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the relevant Regional Authorities.

The five *Waterways Corridor Studies* (Heritage Council, 2002-2007) evaluated the integrated environmental, heritage and tourism potential of the Shannon system, and the Royal and Grand Canals, for the first time. The Fáilte Ireland/ Waterways Ireland *Lakelands and Inland Waterways Strategic Plan 2010-2015* set out a vision for Ireland’s inland waterways. It promoted the rivers, canals and lakes as an experiential form of tourism, based on heritage, water-based recreation and an authentic ‘real Ireland’ experience. The refurbishment of the ‘Shannon-Erne Waterway’ as part of the Northern Ireland peace process, linking the Shannon and Erne systems in 1994, created new opportunities for water-based tourism development of scale. Despite these many initiatives, the Shannon has continued to underperform relative to its tourism potential over many decades.

The cruising experience, a key USP of the Shannon, enjoyed a peak of c. 500 boats in the 1994-2002 period but has since been in decline. The current fleet of 224 boats (2018) is 50% less, with a resulting decline in retail, catering and suppliers along the Shannon, particularly outside the main centres of Athlone, Carrick on Shannon and Limerick.

Although the Irish Boat Rentals Association (IBRA) report a small increase in cruise boat demand since 2017, competing destinations and changing tourism trends to short breaks continue to create challenges for the Shannon tourism product. On the upside, trends towards a more experiential, activity-based form of tourism in the past decade create significant opportunities for the future Shannon tourism offering.

This masterplan presents an opportunity to create a singular Shannon destination. High quality, integrated and sustainable water- and land-based activities and experiences, attractive to both domestic and international visitors, are key. It will be founded on the international principles of sustainable tourism development (see Section 2.1).

Its purpose is to underpin the most recent of Ireland’s tourism propositions, Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, which completes the branding of Ireland into four distinct tourist offerings (see Section 2.2). In supporting and aligning with this proposition, the masterplan will contribute to a much greater regional balance of tourism activity. New opportunities for economic activity will be generated by supporting tourism businesses and local employment. In an area that has previously underperformed economically, widening employment and enterprise opportunities will result in significant societal and environmental benefits. These benefits underpin the overall masterplan strategy and proposed interventions as detailed in the following chapters of this plan.

2.1 Principles of Sustainable Tourism Development

The masterplan is framed within the international VICE model for sustainable tourism development as the interaction between Visitors, the Industry that provides services, the Community and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on, and response to, the Environment where it all takes place.

To achieve sustainable tourism development, these interdependent VICE objectives have been specifically framed for the Shannon (see Figure 3):

Figure 3 VICE Objectives for the Shannon



2.2 Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands

The Shannon forms the spine of **Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands**, the new experience tourism proposition for Ireland, launched in 2018, alongside *The Wild Atlantic Way*, *Ireland’s Ancient East* and *Dublin – Surprising by Nature*.

Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands embraces the heart of the country from Leitrim southwards to Lough Derg, extending through Roscommon, West Cavan, Longford, East Galway, East Clare and parts of Westmeath, Offaly and Tipperary.

The brand of *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* promises a bold and ambitious strategic focus on the tourism potential of Ireland’s midlands, with the Shannon as its spine. *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* promises to ‘bring to life for visitors the Midlands’ rich natural assets including its many lakes, walkways and blueways’. Fáilte Ireland has identified the Shannon as one of two ‘transformational signature products of scale’ in *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands*, that are key to unlocking the region’s potential (the second being the *Beara Breifne Way*). This recognises the value and potential of both the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway, and their associated lakes and canals, as a critical corridor for water-based and land-based tourism activities.



‘Active in Nature’
‘Active in nature’ is at the core of *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* proposed experiences. The River Shannon, with its many natural assets, is well placed to capitalise on a growing tourism trend for non-extreme outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, kayaking, boating, fishing, wildlife-watching, camping and glamping. Visitor experiences on the Shannon should encourage visitors to be ‘active in nature’.



Lukers Pub.
© Deirdre Lewis, SLR Consulting

‘Yours to Uncover’
Domestic visitors will be the first target for *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands*. The initial campaign, ‘Yours to uncover’, focused on themes of discovery and exploration. Encouraging visitors to uncover their own unique experience of the natural beauty and hidden treasures should be part of all future Shannon experiences.

2.3 The Opportunity

The Shannon is the core tourism and recreational asset in *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands*. The implementation of this Tourism Masterplan will present an opportunity to drive catalytic change in the levels of tourism in the region.

At present, tourism continues to hold its position as one of Ireland’s key industries. 2018 was the best year to date for Irish tourism, attracting just over 9.5 million international visitors, spending €5.2 billion, with growth recorded across all top performing

markets of GB, USA, Germany and France. The latest CSO data for the first half of 2019 show a continued rise of overseas visitors of 3.5%, in comparison with the same period last year⁵, with strong growth from North America, Australia and mainland Europe, while UK visitors rose marginally⁶.

Table 2 below shows the 5-year trends in visitor numbers (both overseas and domestic) and revenues generated (2014-2018), reflecting the positive upward trend in tourism numbers.

Table 2 **Tourism Numbers in Ireland 2014-2018**⁷

Numbers of Overseas Tourists (000s)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2018 vs 2017
Overseas	7,105	8,036	8,742	9,023	9,609	+ 6.5%
Total ForEx Earnings (€m)	5,137.7	5,963.5	6,539.9	6,959.2	7,383.9	+ 6%
Numbers of Domestic Tourists (000s)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2018 vs 2017
Domestic Tourists	8,991	9,125	9,359	9,626	10,919	+ 13.4%
Revenue (€m)	1,713.5	1,725.3	1,797.7	1,879.1	2,006.0	+ 6%

In order to motivate domestic and overseas tourists, a sustained funding programme to develop the region’s brand, product and capacity is necessary. Delivery of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan, as a core part of the *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* proposition, will act as a catalyst for tourism activity in the region.

.....
5 CSO Overseas Travel June 2019
6 Tourism Ireland data quoted in Irish Times 15/7/2019.
7 Fáilte Ireland Tourism Facts 2018 Preliminary April 2019 (Overseas) / CSO Household Travel Survey Q4 and Year 2018 (Domestic)

2.4 Taking a Market-Led Approach

It is important that this masterplan is informed by the needs of core target markets, thus taking a market-led approach rather than a supply-side approach. Clear understanding of the motivations and needs of the target market segments for the

Shannon will ensure that the strategic initiatives and recommendations contained in this masterplan will be more focussed, ensuring the greatest return on the investment to be made.

2.4.1 Overseas Market Segments

The two main international target segments for the Shannon in the context of *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* are:

Culturally Curious are independent “active sightseers”, seeking ‘freedom’ through authentic and unusual experiences, exploring, connecting with nature off the beaten track, and prepared to pay for insightful guide. They love to walk, cycle or boat to explore a new place. They are 40+ in age and will usually travel in a couple or as an individual, but rarely in a family group.

Great Escapers are looking for time out to recharge their batteries and reconnect with each other. They want to be in nature and soak up beauty but will also visit a castle or landmark. They enjoy being off the beaten track to explore the elements – stars, water etc. and will take part in strenuous but not extreme activities; appreciate peace and quiet, but also enjoy the ‘wow factor’ without too much effort. They are usually couples in their 30s, may have young children, or couples in their 40s-50s without children. Anglers as ‘great escapers’ may have specialist requirements.

2.4.2 Domestic Market Segments

Fáilte Ireland has outlined two segments of the domestic market that can be considered for the Shannon⁸:

Connected Families make up 23% of the domestic tourism market, comprising relatively young families, parents in their 30s-40s and children under-10. Holidays offer an opportunity to spend quality time together, creating lasting memories. They plan ahead to find best places to stay, hidden gems and activities that can be shared. Connected Families book 3-6 months ahead, online. Typical family breaks are for 4-7 days, staying in hotels or self-catering houses.

Indulgent Romantics make up 14% of the domestic market and are aged between 45 and 64. They like going to different places and enjoy shopping, pampering and great food. They take spontaneous weekend breaks in romantic hubs, with good deals for a particularly nice hotel, restaurant, food and wine, at a certain standard of comfort. Indulgent Romantics book online; but may book at short notice with the right offer. Their breaks are short, relying on hotel and booking sites, but they are not active users of social media.

2.4.3 Expected Growth of Tourism Activity

The targets for future visitor numbers have been set in the context of current trends in visitor numbers sourced from Fáilte Ireland’s research⁹. The current number of visitors to *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* is estimated at around 3% of both total domestic and international visitors to Ireland, with targets for growth set at an average of 3% year on year.

In projecting visitor numbers, it is important to consider several factors. Firstly, existing visitor numbers are at a very low base relative to other Irish tourism regions, which makes it challenging when estimating the potential growth from a sustained and strategic investment campaign.

Secondly, as the *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* brand is in its initial stages, the potential to grow is much greater. Although the region will attract visitors in lower numbers than other brand propositions, the opportunity to evolve and develop its capacity is significant.

Table 3 below sets out projected future visitor numbers to the *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* region to 2030, as determined for the period of the masterplan. These numbers have been estimated on a conservative basis of compound year-on-year growth of 3% for domestic and 3% for overseas visitors, respectively.

Table 3 Projected future Visitor Numbers to Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands (to 2030)

Visitor Numbers 2018	Total Overseas Visitors 2018	Total Domestic 2018	Total
Visitor Numbers to Ireland	9,609,000	10,919,000	20,528,000
Visitors to Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands in 2018 (3% of total)	433,000	452,000	885,000
Visitor Numbers: Projections by 2030	Total Overseas	Total Domestic	Total
Projected Annual Visitor Numbers to Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, based on conservative compound growth of 3% year-on-year	581,915	607,450	1,189,365

The projections of annual visitor numbers of c. 1.19 million to *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* by 2030 give a good indication of the extent of visitor infrastructure that is likely to be required to facilitate up to 304,000 additional visitors to the region.

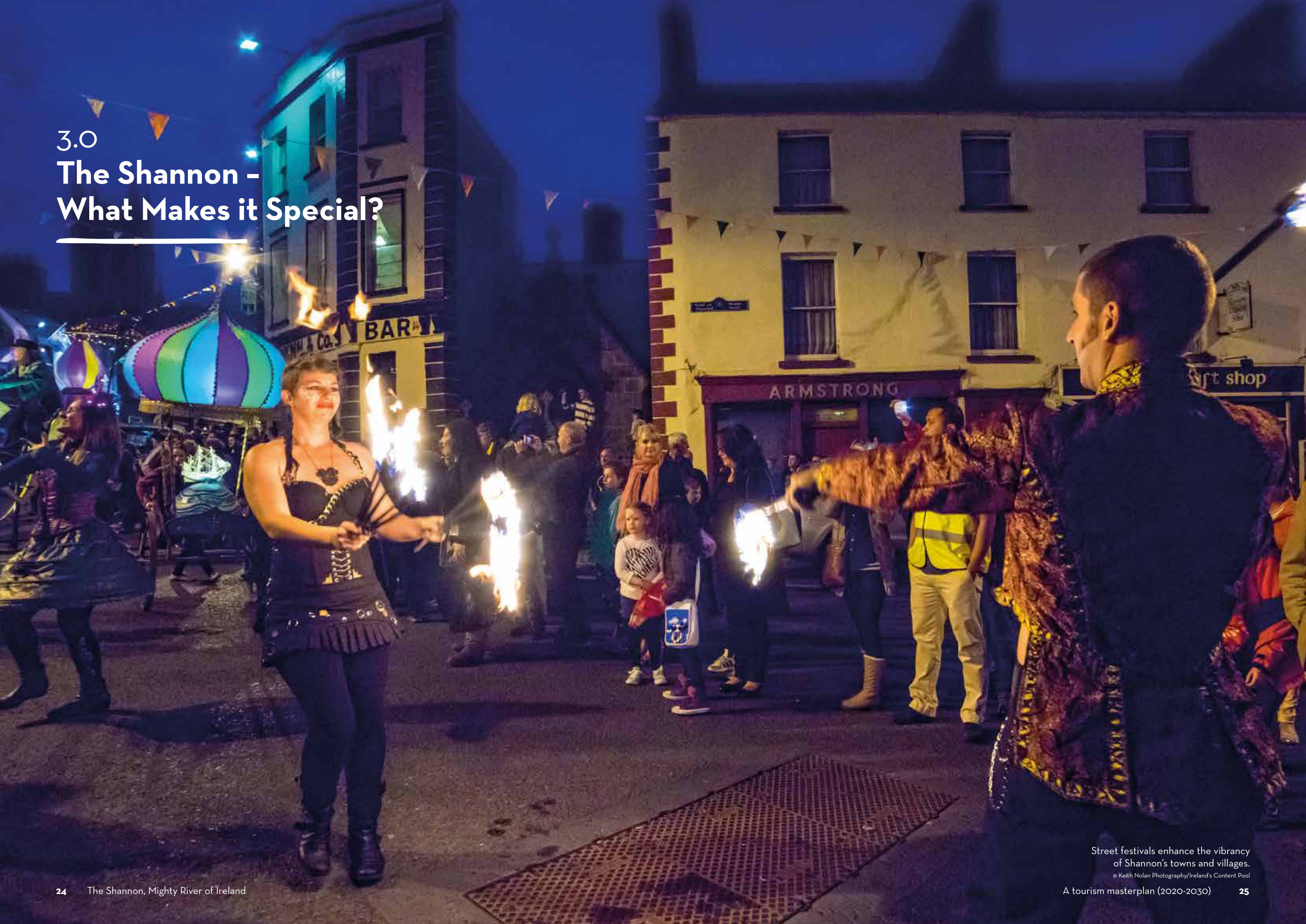
A key target will be to ‘capture’ visitors on the east-west Dublin-West Coast axis by offering ‘reasons to stop and stay’ and by creating vibrant, world class, compelling towns, villages, attractions and activities all along the Shannon.

9 Tourism Facts 2018 (Preliminary). Fáilte Ireland, April 2019. www.failteireland.ie/research

8 Fáilte Ireland: Driving Growth Through Segmentation. www.failteireland.ie/publications

3.0

The Shannon – What Makes it Special?



Street festivals enhance the vibrancy
of Shannon's towns and villages.

© Keith Nolan Photography/Ireland's Content Pool

The Shannon comprises a large, complex natural and cultural system with distinctive land- and waterscapes. To generate a coherent sense of what makes it special, there needs to be consistency in how the area is presented to visitors, before, during and after their visit. A shared understanding is required of what key segments to the Shannon will seek, expect, remember and tell friends and family about afterwards. This demands clarity about the experiences that make the Shannon special; what gives it its unique qualities and memorable sense of place.

3.1 What is Unique about the Shannon?

The Shannon is the longest river in Ireland, with a total length from source to mouth of 360km. Together with the Shannon Erne Waterway, it extends over 428km in length and is a geographical feature that is vast in the context of the island of Ireland. It is a largely natural waterbody with relatively calm and tranquil waterways, that are easy to navigate and accessible to all who wish to experience them. Along its course, this mighty river passes through a variety of landscapes; uplands, mountains, farmlands, peatlands, wetlands and floodplains (callows) that provide the unique backdrop to the vibrant towns and villages along its banks.

The Shannon comprises a unique mosaic of upland, terrestrial and aquatic environments, supporting a variety of habitats and species that are significant on a national as well as European level. It is a significant feature of Ireland's natural capital and provides a wide range of ecosystem services.

Its scale has influenced human settlement for thousands of years, acting as a strategic access route into the heart of Ireland. The river historically formed the natural boundary between the east and west of Ireland and continues to act as the boundary between County and Region.

Its crossing points were of strategic military importance, leading to bloody sieges at Athlone and Limerick, and the development of Ireland's only inland Martello towers at Banagher, Meelick and Shannonbridge.

The story of the Shannon begins with the historic interplay between river, lake and land, and the communities along its banks. The Shannon invites the visitor to relax and stimulate all of their senses through the landscape, sounds and textures of nature, fun activities, good quality local food and up-close encounters with local people.

Unique experiences to be had on the Shannon



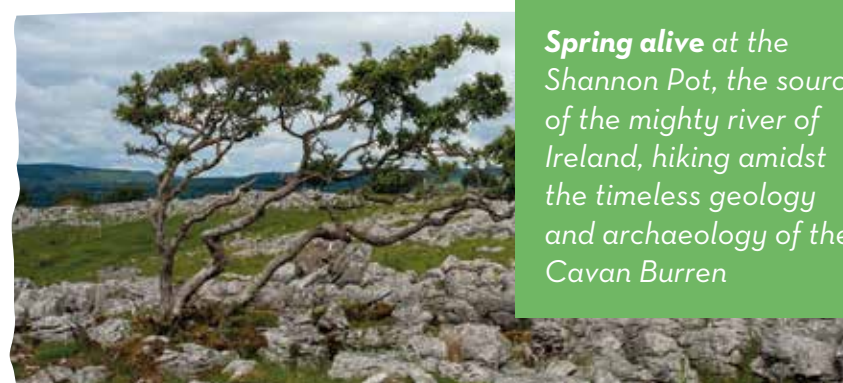
Discover the freedom of the Shannon's inland waterways as captain of your own cruise boat



Uncover the secrets of medieval Rindoon or the uninhabited islands of Lough Ree



Venture by kayak along the Shannon Blueways or cycle the Royal Canal Greenway



Spring alive at the Shannon Pot, the source of the mighty river of Ireland, hiking amidst the timeless geology and archaeology of the Cavan Burren



Hear the roar of the mighty Shannon at the 100-year old Ardnacrusha power station; a testament to human ingenuity linked to the foundation of Ireland as an independent state



Explore the unique natural history of the Shannon peatlands on foot or bike and discover your inner 'spirit level' in the great outdoors



Take a slowboat to the ancient monastic sites of Clonmacnoise and Inisceiltra

3.2 The Vision for the Shannon

The Shannon offers a wellspring of landscapes, experiences, activities and opportunities to immerse in nature, all the while in close connection with rural villages and communities. The unexpected can happen – a visitor may catch that elusive fish, happen upon a seed-saving harvest or hear a tune in a traditional pub, but the fun to be had over a pint and the local welcome are always there.

Figure 4 Multiple Ways to Interact with the Shannon



Founded on these qualities, the Tourism Masterplan establishes a long-term vision for the Shannon upon which to build a highly distinctive and internationally attractive tourist destination.

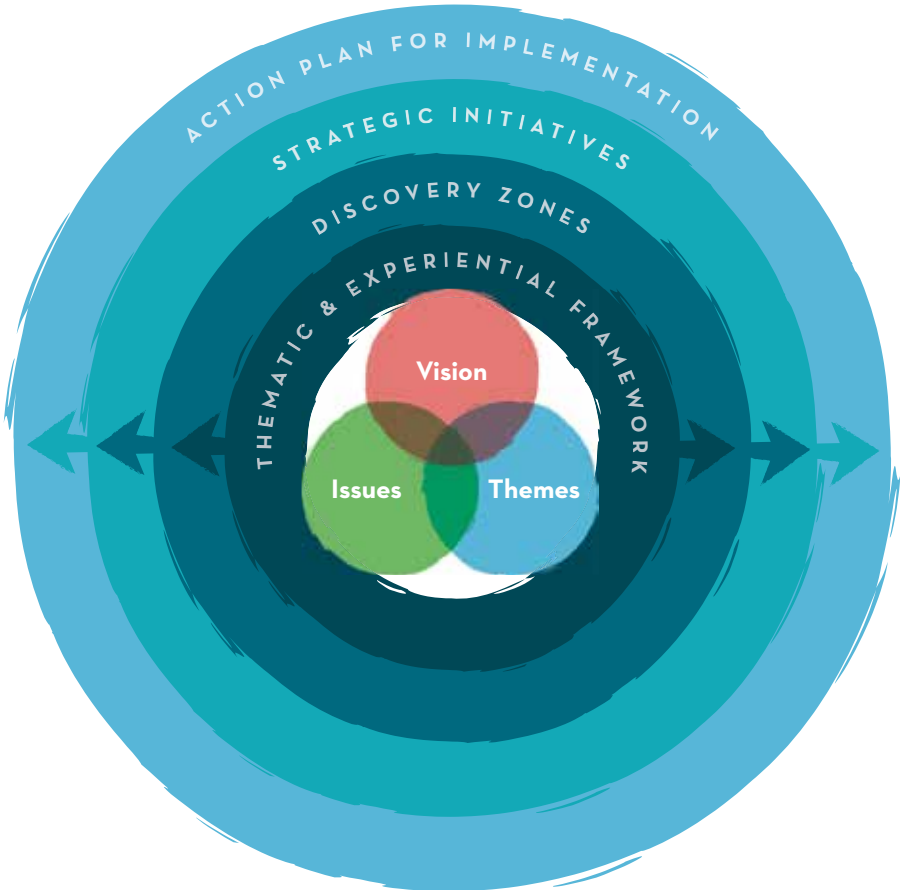
THE MIGHTY SHANNON WILL BECOME IRELAND'S SURPRISING HEART

It will be highly valued for its special environmental qualities and biodiversity, by locals and visitors alike. It will be a haven for on-water and off-water experiences offering a range of ways to be active in nature in a sustainable manner. The Shannon will invite the visitor to slow down, stay longer and to engage with its heritage and communities, providing a sense of the real Ireland and creating an unforgettable holiday experience.

Based on this shared vision and key issues to be addressed, the team developed a thematic and experiential framework. The latter will underpin strategic initiatives that will activate the delivery of compelling tourism experiences and projects.

Through implementation of these initiatives and key projects across Shannon's three spatial Discovery Zones, the ambition for a world class sustainable tourism destination will be realised (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Developing a Sustainable Tourism Destination on the Shannon



4.0 Thematic & Experiential Framework for the Shannon



Pre-swim early morning stretch at
Ballycuggaran, near Killaloe, County Clare
on the Lough Derg Blueway.
© Patrick Bolger/Ireland's Content Pool

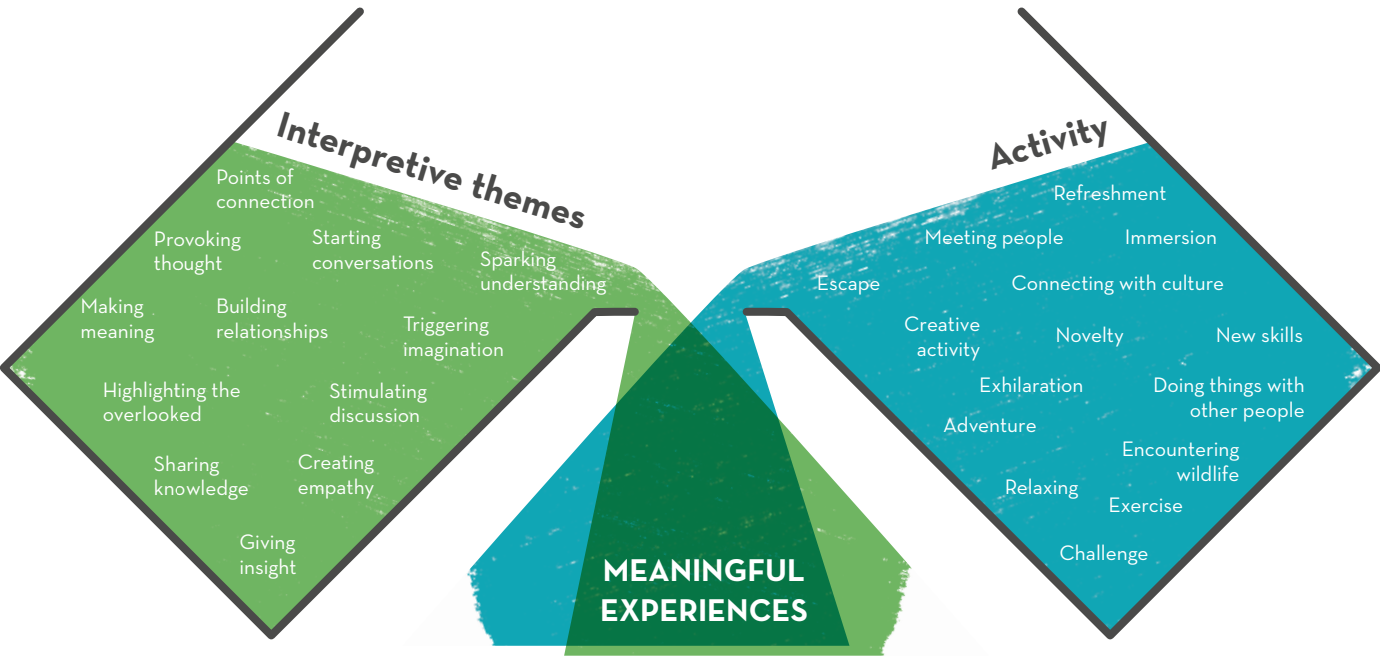
A ‘Shannon inspired’ thematic and experiential interpretative framework has been developed to highlight the distinctive qualities of the Shannon. This will set the context for the types of experience that visitors should find along the waterways. The resulting **Themes** and **Inspirers** are rooted in the vision and qualities of the Shannon as identified by people who live and work there, who love and understand it.

4.1 Interpretation Themes and Thematic Planning

The concept of ‘interpretative themes’ for a place represents the big ideas that we want visitors to both think and talk about – these should be the things that people will remember long after their holiday ends.

People’s experience and memories of the Shannon will be built from what is meaningful to them. Combining the interpretation themes for the Shannon with enjoyable activity will create meaningful experiences (Figure 6).

Figure 6 **Creating Meaningful Experiences of the Shannon: Combining Activity and Interpretation Themes**



Three major **Themes** that best signify the Shannon were developed during the consultation process. These are supported by **Inspirers**, which colour the thematic context and activities that create meaningful experiences.

The defined Shannon themes are:

- ✓ simple so that they are appropriate for people at leisure; and
- ✓ broad so that they are relevant in a range of contexts.

These themes should be used consistently across the Shannon as the basis of future interpretation strategies and experience development.

4.2 Three Shannon Themes

All visitors to the Shannon should encounter the three big thematic ideas (Figure 7) repeatedly during their stay and remember them afterwards. The themes should be used creatively to embed references to the Shannon in all experiences.

Figure 7 **The Three Shannon Themes**



4.2.1 Using the Shannon Themes

The Shannon themes should be embedded in all future experience development and communication media.

The themes will embody the unique sense of the Shannon: its scale, culture, superb environments and the appropriate range and types of experience that people will encounter when they visit (Table 4).

Table 4 Using the Shannon Themes to develop Experiences

 The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland Priority for Theme All visitors should leave with a sense of the scale and importance of the Shannon. Characteristics of Theme • Local pride in the scale of the Shannon, • Longest in Ireland and Britain • Runs through the heart of Ireland like an artery • An icon of the nation Appropriate Experiences • Experiencing the whole river by boat • Linked experiences along the river • Telling stories about movement along the river • Using maps, publications, audio or videos that show the whole river.	 The Natural Timeless Shannon Priority for Theme This theme influences how Shannon experiences are delivered more than what those experiences are. Thus the need to ensure that tourism development does not damage the natural environment and biodiversity. Characteristics of Theme • Stepping into a longer timescale and slower pace • The world of our ancestors seems close • New ways of connecting, personal reflection and creativity • A timeless river, running freely, unconstrained and natural • Water and land mingle - lakes, bogs, callows, meadows, woodlands • Home to animals and plants that have lived here for centuries • Natural resources of the Shannon have provided food, building materials, stories and inspiration for local people Appropriate Experiences • Getting people onto the water • Encouraging immersion in the natural environment • Encouraging calmness reflection and creativity • Relating to how people past and present, live with the Shannon • Featuring arts inspired by or rooted in the Shannon • Highlighting how the natural resources of the Shannon have been harnessed past and present
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 Shannon Journeys & Adventures Priority for Theme This theme highlights the important of adventure and inner and outer journeys. Characteristics of Theme • Throughout history, the Shannon has been an important route. • The crossing points became/are meeting places, settlements, centres of trade and sometimes, conflict. • Travelling by water is part of the Shannon way of life Appropriate Experiences • Offering a challenge/opportunity to try something new • Moving along the Shannon • Telling stories of people who travelled the Shannon; • Linking communities/locations along the river; • Creating arrivals • Creating adventures

4.3 Inspirers - Experience Development Supports

The Experience Inspirers provide the ‘colour’ and foundations for developing distinctively Shannon experiences.

They recognise that visitors want to be active in nature and to experience the Shannon’s unique ‘sense of place’, which includes hearing stories and meaningful contact with local people (Figure 8).

Figure 8 The Shannon Experience Inspirers



The Shannon Themes and Experience Inspirers have been used throughout the Masterplan to identify opportunities and propose integrated thematic experiences for tourism development of the Shannon.

4.4 RECOMMENDATION: Thematic Interpretation

The Shannon Themes and Inspirers should be embedded in all Shannon interpretative materials and used by all providers to shape the next generation of experiences on the Shannon. The thematic framework should be used in all future promotional and communications strategies.

See Strategic Initiative 1 below for recommendations.

5.0 Shannon Discovery Zones



The vision for the Shannon can be realised by offering compelling visitor experiences that reflect the qualities and assets that distinguish this superb region from other destinations. Three spatial Discovery Zones that characterise this distinctiveness are proposed with specific recommendations for key experience development opportunities.

5.1 Three Discovery Zones of the Shannon

The distinctive elements of the Shannon proposition, including landscapes (hills, karst, lakes, peatlands, wetlands, callows¹⁰, farmlands); key habitats, species and protective designations (SACs SPAs, NHAs¹¹); settlements and key attractions were characterised along its length.

Emerging from this analysis, three spatial **‘Discovery Zones’**, based on the unique elements of each, were identified (Table 5; Figure 9).

10 *Callow*: an Irish term for fertile riverine meadows, subject to seasonal flooding, rich in flora and fauna.

11 SAC Special Areas of Conservation; SPA Special Protection Areas; NHA National Heritage Areas

Table 5 **Three Discovery Zones of the Shannon**

Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon	Discovery Zone 2: Mid-Shannon	Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon
<i>Lough Allen and Shannon Erne Waterway</i>	<i>Lough Ree, peatlands & Shannon Callows</i>	<i>Lough Derg & Lower Shannon</i>
The source of the Shannon, characterised by hills and blanket bogs; subterranean caves; with winding rivers and canals meandering through towns and villages in the lowlands. DZ1 offers a unique blend of hills, rivers, canals, forests and opportunities to fully immerse in a natural way of living. Dispersed rural villages, with key Shannon crossing points, lie at the hub of the zone, many of which are exemplars of sustainable living.	The harmonious landscapes of the Shannon lowlands are punctuated by lakes, wetlands and peat bogs, fringed by low ridges and islands. The Shannon’s monastic and medieval heritage is at the core, marked by crossings, canals, trade and refuge over centuries. Athlone, located at an historic crossing point of the Shannon, provides the vibrant heart of the zone.	The Shannon flows south to Lough Derg, fringed by picturesque lakeside villages and forest walks. It passes Inisiscaltra, the holy island, before harnessing the power of the mighty Shannon at Ardnacrusha, on its final journey to the sea at Limerick. The visitor can truly experience a full array of fun and exciting water activities in this vibrant adventure zone.

Each Shannon Discovery Zone is differentiated by its landscapes, quality of experiences, culture and richness of interactions with local people, but is seated within the Shannon as a singular, rich and varied destination.

In defining essential visitor experiences for each Discovery Zone (Figure 9), the Interpretative Themes and experience Inspirers were used to identify compelling signature and supporting experiences for development (Table 6).



Shannon wetlands.
© Michael Anderton



Reflections on a Bog Pool.
© Deirdre Lewis, SLR Consulting

Figure 9 Three Discovery Zones on the Shannon



Table 6 Shannon Discovery Zones: Thematic Framework to support Tourism Experience Development

Shannon Themes



The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland



The Natural, Timeless Shannon



Shannon Journeys & Adventures

Shannon Inspirers

- Adventures
- Journeys
- Slow
- Contact with Water
- On-water
- Local People
- Environmentally Aware
- Relates to Whole River

Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon
Lough Allen, Lough Key & Shannon Erne Waterway

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

Hike the Cavan Burren and UNESCO Geopark where Shannon rises	
Explore the Shannon Pot, mythical source of the Shannon	

The Natural, Timeless Shannon

Adventure slowly on the Shannon-Erne Waterway	
Go out with an angling guide who knows where the fish are	

Shannon Journeys & Adventures

Sunset Cruise from Carrick on Shannon to Roosky	
Walk, paddle and forage in the hills and lakes of Leitrim	
Explore the tree-top walks and family adventures at Lough Key Activity Park	
Adventure and fun at Lough Allen Waterpark, Shannon River Adventure, Roosky	
Enjoy a pint, a tune and a chat in Shannon pubs and bars	
Explore the Arigna Mining Experience	
Cycle the Shannon Blueway	

Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon
Lough Ree, Shannon Callows Peatlands

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

Be intrigued by the story of the Siege of Athlone in Athlone Castle, at this historically important fording point on the Shannon	
Catch a slow boat to Clonmacnoise Monastic Complex	

The Natural, Timeless Shannon

See the Dark Skies of Boora Bog with a local guide	
Circumnavigate the islands of Lough Ree, while angling for pike or trout.	
Cycle around Longford's restored wetlands	
Guided bird-watching in the wetlands of the Shannon Callows	

Shannon Journeys & Adventures

Walk the ancient Corlea Trackway and Peatways	
Walk the Famine Trail from Strokestown to Clondara	
Let the kids go wild at Lough Boora Discovery Park	
Enjoy adventure and fun at Hodson Bay	
Enjoy a pint, a tune and a chat in Shannon pubs and bars	
Explore vibrant Athlone, a vital hub on the Shannon	
Cycle the Royal Canal Greenway	

Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon
Lough Derg & lower Shannon to Limerick

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

See stunning views from Tountinna hiking on the Lough Derg Way	
Enjoy traditional music sessions at the many lakeshore pubs	

The Natural, Timeless Shannon

Explore Iniscealtra (6th century 'Holy Island')	
Ardnacrusha: 100 years of Shannon power	
View white-tailed eagles or starling murmurations on Lough Derg	
Go out with an angling guide who knows where the fish are	

Shannon Journeys & Adventures

Cruise on the Shannon from Killaloe or Portumna	
Water-based, fun activities around Lough Derg	
Biking, hiking or exploring the lakeshore	
Explore Limerick, Shannon's oldest city and historic crossing	
Paddle or walk the revitalised Errinagh Canal	
Walk/cycle the Shannon Greenway	
Enjoy a pint, a tune and a chat in Shannon pubs and bars	

5.2 Visitor Experience Development Framework

Fáilte Ireland’s *Experience Development Framework* model (Figure 10), based on international best practice, was used to define specific recommendations for visitor experiences in each of the Shannon Discovery Zones.

Figure 10 Visitor Experience Pyramid



Angling on Lough Allen.
© Fáilte Ireland

The destination promise of the Shannon Themes and Inspirers (Chapter 4; Figure 7, Figure 8) inspired the definition of a series of distinctive **Experience Themes, Hero Products** (as signature experiences) and **Supporting Experiences** in each Discovery Zone. Additional services available in the surrounding localities and in Shannon Towns and Villages are suggested in the **Ancillary Experiences**. Some of the experiences are already in existence, but require strengthening, while others will emerge through the implementation of the Strategic Initiatives proposed in the masterplan (Chapter 6.0).

Experience Framework ‘pyramids’ were produced for each of the Discovery Zones, to illuminate how each experience links the experiential framework to the overarching Shannon themes and inspirers. These will be used to inform and provide a clear developmental framework for the preparation of Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) for each Discovery Zone by the partners and key stakeholders at a later time.

The first of these VEDPs is under preparation as the *Lough Derg Destination Development Strategy*, prepared by the Lough Derg Marketing Group, and informed by the emerging propositions in this Shannon Masterplan.

Based on the **Shannon Thematic and Experiential Framework** (Chapter 4.0 above), a distinctive mix of thematic products and experiences, are proposed for each Discovery Zone, to support tourism experience development (Table 6). Each part of the Shannon has a story to tell, based on culture, nature and industrial heritage; but thematic experiences should fundamentally entice the visitor to continue their journey onwards through the Shannon.

5.3 Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon

The Mighty Shannon starts its long journey in *Discovery Zone 1 Upper Shannon*, rising quietly from the underworld at Shannon Pot, flowing southwards via majestic Lough Allen to the riverlands of Carrick on Shannon. The Shannon-Erne Waterway provides a stunning lake-and-canal blueway link to the River Erne, while Lough Key offers adventure for all the family. Dotted with welcoming villages and towns, this zone offers exceptional insights to the source of Mighty Shannon and the adventures and journeys to be had.

5.3.1 Discovery Zone 1: What distinguishes Upper Shannon?

The northern landscapes of **Discovery Zone 1** are dominated by the Leitrim-Cavan-Roscommon uplands and the geological wonderland of the Cavan Burren, part of the international UNESCO Marble Arch-Cuilcagh Mountains Geopark, where the mighty Shannon rises at the ‘Shannon Pot’ (Figure 11).

Visitors will enjoy Shannon journeys while hiking on the newly invigorated *Beara Breifne Way*, the historical *Miners Way* and *Historical Trail*, the *Leitrim Way* or *Cavan Way*. Potential exists to reinvigorate the historical *Humbert Way* through Drumkeeran and Drumshanbo in Leitrim. Additionally, cycling, mountain biking and kayaking, organic foods, community arts and wellbeing are at the heart of this hidden part of Ireland. Angling is available in the many lakes, with local guides who are a fountain of ‘fishy’ knowledge.

In the lowlands, *Lough Key Forest Park* offers treetop walks, family fun activities and exploratory lake cruises, as well as a new cycleway along the canal to Boyle, home of *Boyle Abbey* and *King House*. Onwards to the *Arigna Mining Experience*, where miners take visitors deep underground to explore this regions’ vital industrial and social heritage.

The *Shannon-Erne Waterway*, a unique 64km Victorian passage of lakes and canals, is home to a blueway through the drumlin-dotted countryside, where the waterside villages of Leitrim, Ballinamore, Ballyconnell and Belturbet provide a welcome, food and entertainment, as well as a critical cruising link to the Erne system. The blueway along the Shannon-Erne offers a means to explore the lakes, canals and hinterlands rich in heritage.

Carrick on Shannon is the beating heart of Discovery Zone 1, rich in heritage, offering a large marina and cruise hire hub, accommodation, foods and markets, as well as galleries, theatre, traditional pubs and music. The proposed Carrick-to-Leitrim village boardwalk will allow visitors to walk/ cycle alongside the Shannon to join *Acres Lake* and Drumshanbo on the shores of Lough Allen, close to nature in the quiet of the Leitrim countryside. The boardwalk will also link to the blueway along the Shannon Erne Waterway.

Discovery Zone 1 Upper Shannon is distinguished as the home of the organic movement in Ireland and a slow ‘back to nature’ approach to tourism development, offering the visitor a combination of sustainably produced local foods, traditional music and rustic accommodation options in unspoilt landscapes.

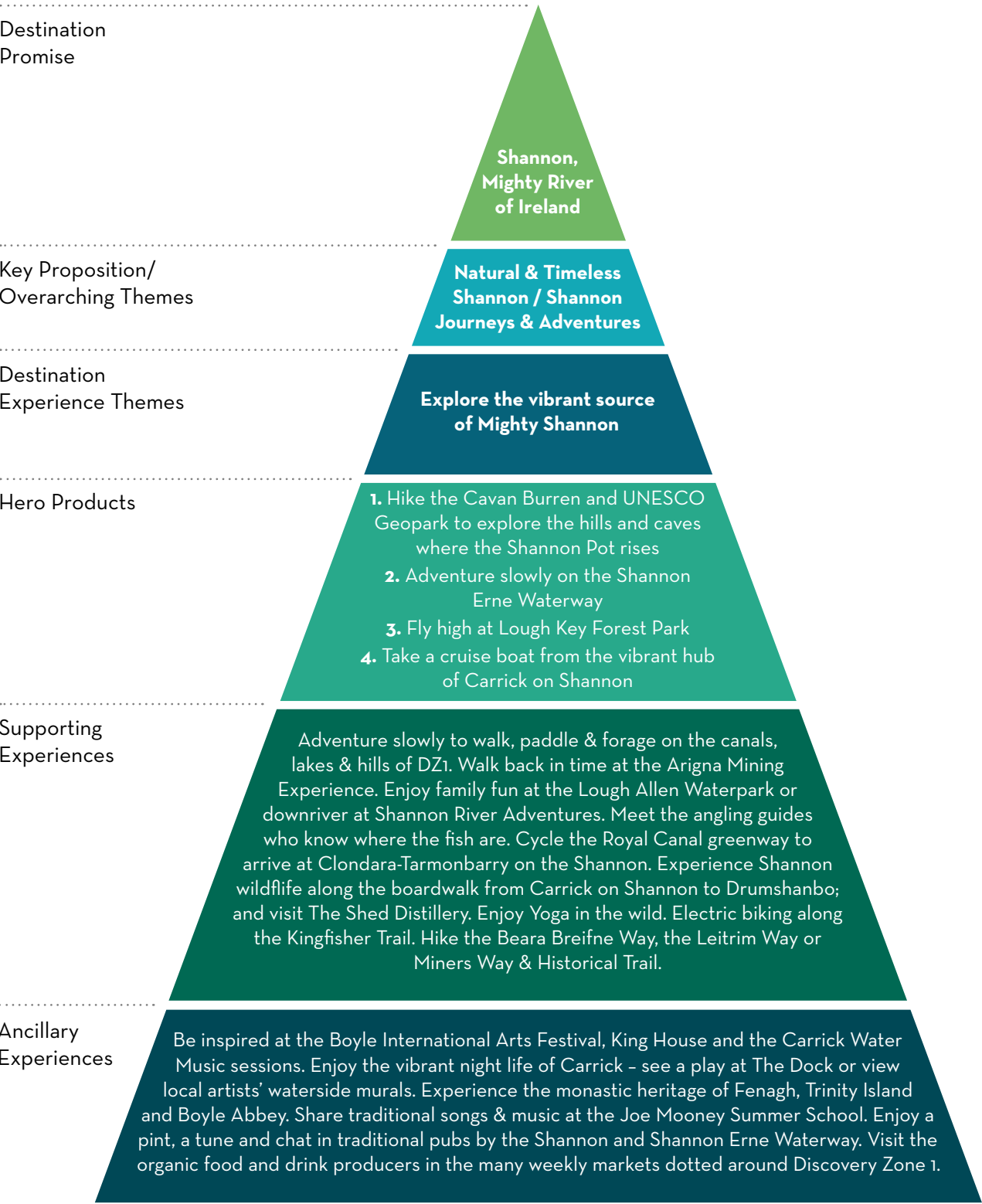
These proposals build on the themes of natural and timeless Shannon, as well as opportunities for slow journeys and adventures to discover the hidden source of Mighty Shannon (see Figure 11 below).

5.3.2 Management Issues: DZ1 Upper Shannon

The following management issues may be considered for Upper Shannon:

- The continued strengthening of Carrick on Shannon, Ballinamore, Ballyconnell, Belturbet and Boyle, as well as the picturesque river- and lakeside villages, as key service hubs within Discovery Zone 1, will be critical to support the distribution of visitors into their hinterlands.

Figure 11 Destination Pyramid for Discovery Zone 1 – Upper Shannon



- Improved integration of the Leitrim-Cavan-Roscommon uplands experience with the Shannon lowlands and lakelands to encourage improved visitor flows from one type of experience to the other.
 - Enhanced east-west /green-blue linkages to optimise the Shannon Erne Waterway and Lough Allen experience offerings.
 - Seek new opportunities and alignment of the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway with Lough Erne initiatives in County Fermanagh (e.g. the Marble Arch-Cuilcagh Mountains Geopark and the emerging Pilgrim Way).
- These propositions are represented on Figure 12 overleaf.

Figure 12 Map showing Discovery
Zone 1: Upper Shannon

Key

★ Visitor attraction

Shannon towns and villages:

● Gateway town

● Hub town

● Town

● Village

— Road

— Canal

🚢 Cruising

🎣 Angling

🚤 Sailing

🚶 Hiking

🕒 Caving

🚴 Cycling

🛶 Kayaking

🛶 Paddling

🏰 Geo-heritage

🚣 Rowing





Cuilcagh mountain from Cavan Burren.
© John Kelly, SLR Consulting

5.3.3 Recommendations: DZ1 Upper Shannon Priority Projects

Subject to environmental assessment and adherence to the principles of sustainable access and design:

DZ1.1 Development of a Destination & Visitor Management Plan for the Shannon Pot

- As per Cavan Co. Council's development proposals for Cavan Burren Park.
- Enhance green linkages to the Cavan Burren and international Marble Arch-Cuilcagh Mountains UNESCO Geopark.

DZ1.2 Develop waterside recreational infrastructure, building linkages and filling 'gaps' where feasible

- Carrick on Shannon to Leitrim Boardwalk; linking to Acres Lake and Lough Allen;
- Strengthen links from the Shannon-Erne Waterway - Lough Allen - Lough Key, through development and promotion of both blueways and waterside trails.

DZ1.3 Lough Key Cycleway

- Proposed cycleway links from Boyle to Lough Key; with ultimate links to Carrick on Shannon (see DZ1.5 below).

DZ1.4 Delivery of long distance, themed journeys to meander slowly into and within the zone:

- Enhancement of the Beara Breifne Way¹²;
- Subject to environmental assessment at the relevant consent stage, support emerging spiritual Pilgrim Way along the Shannon-Shannon Erne Waterway, with onwards links to Lough Erne¹³;
- Revitalise the Humbert Trail that meanders into Leitrim, with links to the Wild Atlantic Way.

DZ1.5 Enhancement of the Lough Key Forest Park experience:

- Support proposals to enhance the family-friendly Lough Key adventure experiences.
- Enhance blue-green linkages to and from Boyle under provisions of Boyle 2040 strategic plan.
- Consider long term green/blueway linkages from Lough Key to the Shannon via Knockvicar.

12 To be based on the recommendations of the forthcoming 'Beara Breifne Way Tourism Activation Plan'.

13 Noting this project is at feasibility stage and may not advance to full commissioning.

5.4 Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon

Discovery Zone 2 Mid Shannon is an elemental zone where Lough Ree and the Shannon Callows meet; where land melts to a mosaic of lakes, wetlands and peatlands; a place of open skies and expansive bogs merging on the horizon; where the visitor will experience a sense of timelessness and of total immersion in nature.

5.4.1 Discovery Zone 2: What distinguishes Mid Shannon?

Discovery Zone 2 stretches from Tarmonbarry/Clondara in the north to Portumna in the south, an elemental zone where lakes, rivers and canals meander through wetlands, peatlands and lowland farms, creating the distinctive 'soft' landscapes of the region.

Proposals are afoot to create a dedicated *Lough Ree Biosphere*, celebrating the natural heritage of the lake, raised bogs and wetlands, as well as proposals for rewilding of (post-production) peatlands. Opportunities exist to transform peatland tracks as accessible off-road recreational infrastructure, where visitors will experience the magnificence of our bogs.

Mid Shannon is home to an array of important cultural heritage sites, such as the *monastic complex at Clonmacnoise* and the *islands of Lough Ree, the Corlea Trackway and Strokestown House Famine Museum* – all symbols of Ireland's colourful and complex past.

Athlone is the thriving capital of this zone, an ancient crossing point on the river, with excellent accommodation, fine dining and attractions. Recent public realm enhancements place Athlone's Castle, Luan Gallery, Cultural Quarter and waterfront at the centre of its tourism offering¹⁴. There is considerable impetus to complete the National Cycleway (Dublin-Galway) westwards from Athlone, where a connecting walk-cycle bridge is planned. The development of a new cycleway from Athlone southwards to Clonmacnoise and onwards to Shannonbridge is also being considered¹⁵ (see Section 6.7.2).

Lough Ree is the beating heart of Mid Shannon, a wonderful mosaic of open waters, hidden bays, monastic islands and wooded shorelines, renowned for angling, cruising, sailing and kayaking, as well as adventure activity zones at Hodson Bay and along Killinure Lough. The southern shores of the lake are host to fine dining and accommodation experiences, from Glasson-Wineport-Killinure-Coosan-Athlone-Hodson Bay, and continued efforts are required to grow this reputation and enhance the offering.

Discovery Zone 2 Mid Shannon promises the visitor the chance to escape to 'the waters and the wild' – a reflection of the integrated mosaic of habitats and species, offering real opportunities to immerse in nature. The proposals to build on this unique combination of assets, led to the adoption of the key Shannon theme 'Natural Shannon', with inspirers 'timeless and natural'. These underpin the range of immersive experiences proposed for Discovery Zone 2 in the Masterplan (see Figure 13 below).

14 See Chap. 3.2.2, Volume 3 Baseline Report for further details of Athlone's integrated strategy.

15 As announced by Minister Boxer Moran 19 Oct. 2019: www.opw.ie/en/latestnews/articleheading.39843,en.html



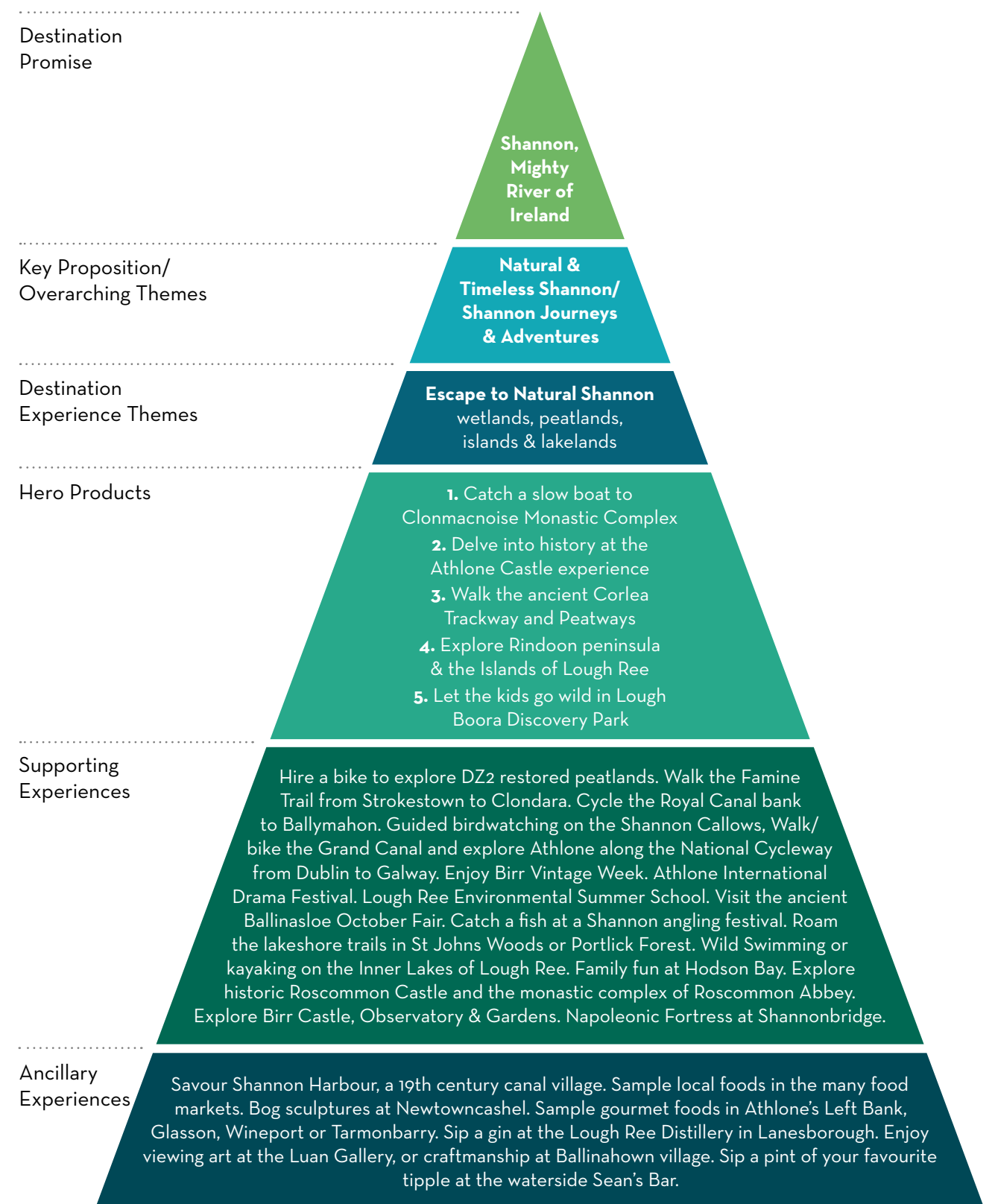
Exploring the Peatlands.
© Deirdre Lewis, SLR Consulting

5.4.2 Management Issues: DZ2 Mid Shannon

The following management issues may be considered for Mid Shannon:

- The continued strengthening of Destination Athlone and surrounding towns and villages as key service centres within Discovery Zone 2, supporting tourism distribution into the hinterlands.
- The need for a broad, integrated approach to the future management of the Mid Shannon callows, in partnership with the local authorities, NPWS, IFI and other bodies such as Birdwatch Ireland.
- Prioritise engagement with Bord na Móna on future opportunities for the Peatlands. This should build on the *'Lough Ree and the Mid Shannon - Spirit Level, A Shared Ambition'* collaboration to establish post-production priorities and management of recreational access to the peatlands.
- Consultations with island landowners to explore opportunities for visitor access to the islands of Lough Ree, from harbours such as Lanesborough-Ballyleague and Portrun-Lecarrow.

Figure 13 **Destination Pyramid for Discovery Zone 2 - Mid Shannon**



These propositions are represented on Figure 14



Lakeside flora, Lough Ree.
© Deirdre Lewis, SLR Consulting



Clonmacnoise Celtic cross.
© Peter Phillipson, TellTale



Calm at Lough Ree.
© Peter Phillipson, TellTale



Ruins at Rindoon.
© Peter Phillipson, TellTale

5.4.3 Recommendations: DZ2 Mid Shannon Priority Projects

Mid Shannon will benefit from the development and enhancement of key visitor experiences at the following locations, subject to agreement of landowners, statutory agencies and local authorities.

Subject to environmental assessment and adherence to the principles of sustainable access and design:

DZ2.1 Development of a Visitor Management Plan for Clonmacnoise (Oct. 2019):

- Consider reconfiguration of access points and facilities to enhance the visitor experience;
- Develop on-water linkages with service hubs upstream and downstream, inclusive of Athlone, Shannonbridge, Shannon Harbour and Banagher;
- Enhanced off-road links from Athlone to Clonmacnoise and Shannonbridge/ Shannon Harbour with links to Lough Boora Discovery Park via Grand Canal to allow immersive experiences..

DZ2.2 Enhanced interpretation and access to Rindoon Medieval Walled Town:

- Consider options for an enhanced Visitor Experience based at Lecarrow / Portrunny, to include access to Rindoon Walled Town and peninsula; and
- Consider options for visitor access to the Lough Ree Islands (subject to landowner agreements) from Lecarrow or Portrunny harbours and/or Lanesborough-Ballyleague/ Hodson Bay harbours.

DZ2.3 Wet'n'Wild Peatlands of Mid Shannon:

- Develop integrated Discovery Zone focused on peatlands' environmental heritage and industrial histories; recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, cycling, guided tours or bog trains;
- Outdoor educational classroom/summer schools to demonstrate climate change in action;
- Range of family fun 'bog snorkelling' or mud-slinging; and
- Creative 'slow' initiatives such as bog carving and sculpture, photography & 'art in the open'.

A sustainable visitor management plan and community consultation will be carried out prior to implementation.

DZ2.4 Expanding the Lough Ree Experience:

- Continue to develop Athlone's waterfront amenities to build a critical mass of attractions and activities, linking the Glasson-Coosan-Wineport-Killinure-Hodson Bay activity-food nexus;
- Completion of the National Cycleway and the new bridge that will deliver 'slow tourism' into the core of Athlone town and DZ2;
- Development of the planned cycleway south from Athlone to Clonmacnoise, linking the National Cycleway to the monastic complex; consider cycle links south to Shannonbridge;
- Completion of the Athlone-Mullingar-Royal Canal circuit to deliver 'active in nature' experiences across the peatlands, directing visitors via Ballymahon-Clondara, thence to Portlick - Athlone based on local consultations.
- Develop an enhanced range of cruise options, boating and guided tours from Athlone waterfront linked to onshore attractions (islands, monastic sites, activity centres, bike tours) and hinterland.

DZ2.5 Improvement of the Visitor Centre at the Corlea Iron Age Trackway

- Prepare an improvement plan for the centre which would explore the expansion of its story and experience to include the Iron Age in Ireland. Measures to improve sustainability should also be considered.

DZ2.6 Surf in the Turf - Surf Wave Centre

Siting options should be evaluated on planning and environmental grounds. Key issues for consideration include:

- Sustainable transport and access
- Water supply
- Landscape and visual impact
- Wastewater treatment infrastructure, and
- Potential impact on internationally designated sites, as well as other features of ecological importance.

Figure 14 Map showing Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon

The map illustrates the Mid Shannon region, highlighting the Shannon River and its connection to Lough Ree. Key features include:

- Visitor Attractions (marked with stars):** Strokestown House Famine Museum, Rindoon Medieval Village & Norman Castle, Lecarrow, Corlea Trackway, Lough Boora, and Wild Peatlands Dark Skies.
- Towns and Villages (marked with dots):** Dromod, Rooskey, Tarmonbarry, Clondara, Longford, Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Portlenny Harbour, Roscommon, Ballymahon, Glasheen, Athlone, Clonmacnoise, Ballinasloe, Shannon Harbour, Banagher, Portumna, and Birr.
- Activities (marked with icons):** Cruising, Birdwatching, Kayaking, Rowing, Sailing, and Swimming.
- Geographical Features:** Lough Ree & Islands, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and various peatlands (e.g., Peatlands, Peatways, Peatlands).
- Infrastructure:** Roads (N4, N5, N61, N62, N63, N65) and the M6 motorway.

5.5 Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon

Lower Shannon offers a vibrant array of outdoor activities, centred on Lough Derg and the last ‘fall’ of the Shannon before entering the sea at Limerick. The landscape is stunning, framed by the Slieve Aughty, Bernagh and Arra Mountains, offering on-water adventures in angling, sailing, kayaking, birdwatching and lake cruising. Off-water, visitors will enjoy hiking, walking and cycling, before the capture of the mighty Shannon’s energy at the 100-year-old Ardnacrusha hydro-power station.

5.5.1 Discovery Zone 3: What distinguishes Lower Shannon?

Discovery Zone 3 Lower Shannon stretches from Portumna at the head of Lough Derg southwards to Limerick, where the Shannon embarks on its final journey to the sea. Lough Derg is the dramatic and dominant feature, with its myriad small islands and hidden bays, framed by farmlands and the hills of Slieve Aughty, Bernagh and Arra. Killaloe/Ballina is located at the southern narrows of Lough Derg, not far from the monastic complex of *Inisceiltra*, the sixth century holy island and *Béal Ború*, the ancient fort of the High King of Ireland.

Lough Derg is an active tourism centre, renowned for angling, boating, sailing and water sports. Playing to its natural strengths, multiple family-fun, high octane activity bases are available at O’Brien’s Bridge, Castlelough, Kilgarvan, Dromineer and Ballycuggaran/Two-milegate. Many of these centres are linked by a series of Blueways, with plans afoot to develop both cross-lake experiences and journeys, as well as pilot tranquillity zones in Scariff Bay. The Shannon flows southwards through Castleconnell to thriving Limerick City, the oldest riverside city and lowest bridging point on the Shannon. At Ardnacrusha, the energy of the mighty Shannon is captured at this 100-year old hydroelectric power station, an icon of Irish industrial independence. The older and under-utilised Errinagh canal runs directly from Killaloe to Limerick.

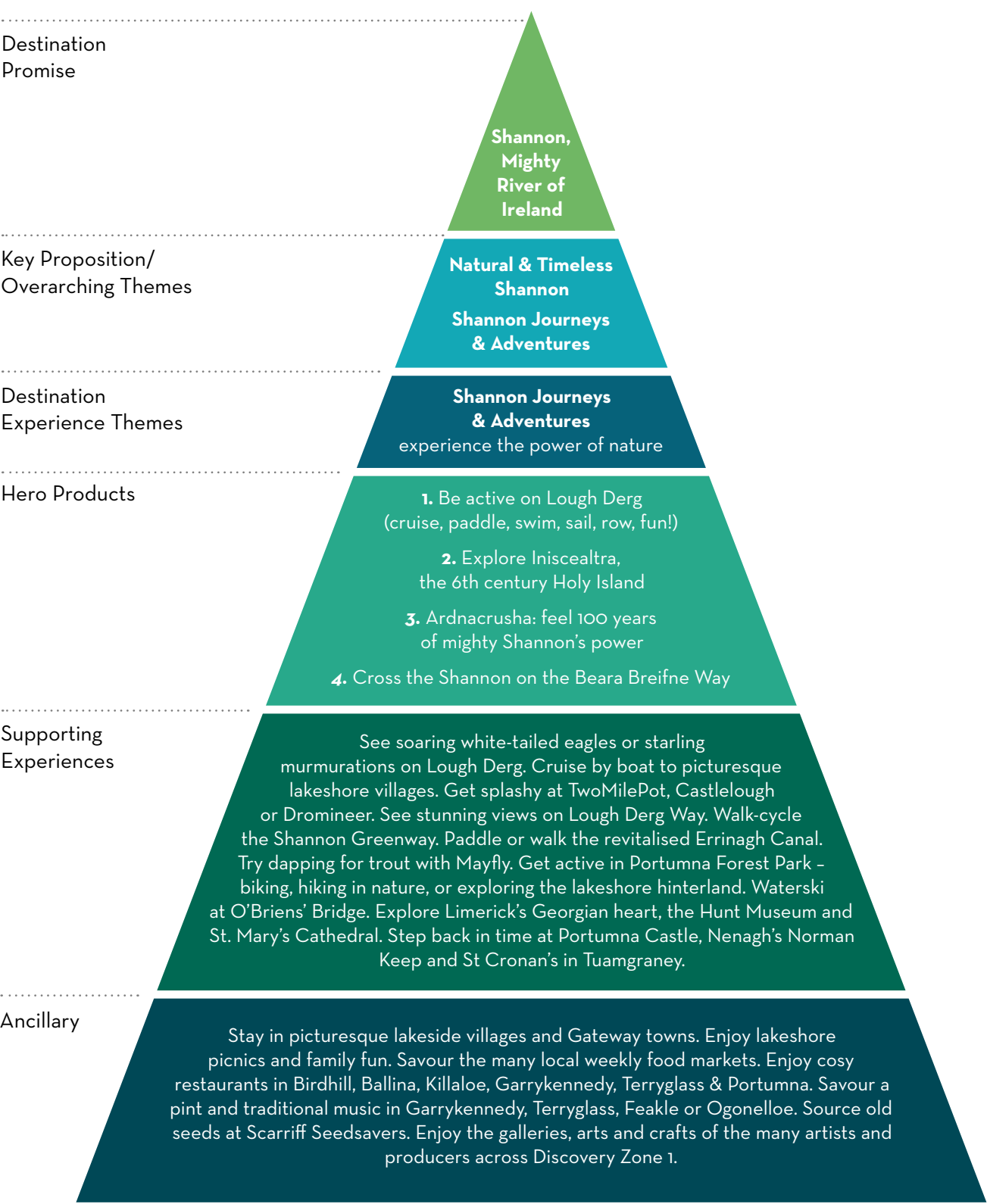
Lough Derg presents superb views and birdwatching opportunities while hiking along the *Lough Derg Way*, *East Clare Way* and *Beara Breifne Way*. A number of county cycle routes allow

exploration of the hinterlands, including Nenagh Castle, and Woodford/ Gortinny in east Galway. Lower Shannon will form a core element of the emerging *Pilgrim Way*, offering clusters of early Medieval monastic sites of exceptional interest and preservation at Limerick, Killaloe, Tuamgraney, Inisceiltra, Johnstown, Lorrha and Portumna.

After a hectic day of activities, Lower Shannon offers wonderful ancillary experiences, including fine dining, traditional music, concerts and festivals, at different locations throughout the year. Lower Shannon is located in a highly productive agricultural area and has fostered its reputation for excellent local food production and country markets.

Discovery Zone 3 Lower Shannon promises to deliver an active and adventurous experience to the visitor, inviting the visitor to “be active, be enthralled!”. The recently developed Lough Derg ‘Visitor Experience Development Plan’ presents a palette of historic townscapes, key vistas and a range of on-water activities suited to all-comers. This is supported by superb food and drink offerings, distinctive local retail (woollens, chocolates, beeswax, organic products, seeds etc) and an all-year round festival calendar. The combination of the natural and cultural assets led to complementary proposals for Shannon-themed experiences in the masterplan linked to the ‘Power of Nature’. Inspirers based on ‘Journeys and Adventures’ as well as ‘mighty Shannon’ reflect the sheer energy of the Lower Shannon. These underpin the experiences proposed for Discovery Zone 3 in the Masterplan (Figure 15).

Figure 15 Destination Pyramid for Discovery Zone 3 – Lower Shannon



These propositions are represented on Figure 16 below.

Figure 16 Map showing Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon





Having fun on the Shannon at Limerick, a key hub for Discovery Zone 3.

© True Media/Ireland's Content Pool

5.5.2 Management Issues: DZ3 Lower Shannon

The following management issues may be considered for Lower Shannon:

- The continued strengthening of the tourism propositions for Limerick City, Killaloe-Ballina and Portumna, as well as the waterside villages as key service hubs within Discovery Zone 3.
- Implementation of the *Lough Derg Visitor Experience Development Plan 2020-2024* in alignment with the thematic proposals and priority projects of Discovery Zone 3 in the Masterplan.
- Further consultations with key stakeholders regarding development of visitor experiences at both the Iniscealtra and Ardnacrusha attractions, including related tourism infrastructure in surrounding areas.

5.5.3 Recommendations: DZ3 Lower Shannon Priority Projects

The following signature projects are proposed.

DZ3.1 Ardnacrusha - Feasibility Study for redevelopment of Visitor Centre and associated Visitor Management Plan (subject to ESB approvals & collaboration) to address:

- Capacity issues and facilitate an increase in visitors.
- Potential to impact on heritage assets, water quality and designated sites.
- Sustainable access with consideration given use of all feasible modes of transport.
- Options to improve on-water and beside-water activities and links with settlements upstream and downstream e.g. Limerick, O'Brien's Bridge, and Killaloe/Ballina.

DZ3.2 Develop enhanced Castletlough & Portroe Lookout; Active Amenity Zone & Slow Travel Interchange

- Enhance the amenity zone at Castletlough Bay & Woods with safe swimming/ boating/ canoeing access; linking to iconic Portroe Lookout; facilities to enhance visitor experience.
- Enhanced links from Castletlough Woods onwards to Ballina/Killaloe (south) and Garrykenny/Dromineer (north) along Lough Derg Way and/or by boat along the lake.
- Careful consideration should be given to potential impacts on heritage assets, landscape and visual amenity, sustainable transport and access, water quality and designated sites.

DZ3.3 Feasibility Study for Development of 'Shannon Greenway'

- Linking Limerick, via Clonlara, Ardnacrusha, O'Brien's Bridge, Killaloe/Ballina, Tuamgraney and Scariff*
- Utilise public lands (canals, forests, amenity zones) where possible.
- Priority should be given to the re-use and enhancement of existing trails.
- Limit environmental effects by minimising the development of additional infrastructure and ensuring that trail surfaces are permeable and do not impact on designated sites.

*Consider future links to Mountshannon, with direct links to Iniscealtra Visitor experience.

DZ3.4 Implementation of the Iniscealtra Visitor Management Plan

- It is strongly recommended that the recommendations of the VMP for Iniscealtra (Holy Island) be expedited as soon as possible. Critically the development of a Visitor Centre at Mountshannon, with guided access to the island, will provide a springboard for a unique visitor experience in the East Clare corridor adjacent to the Shannon, from Killaloe, to Tuamgraney (St. Cronan's), Scariff and Mountshannon, and northwards towards Portumna.
- Development of potential cross-Shannon visitor boating links from other villages around Lough Derg to Iniscealtra Visitor Centre and island experience.

DZ3.5: Portumna Attractions - Integrated Tourism Development Plan

- Prepare an integrated tourism development plan incorporating Portumna Castle, Forest Park, Harbour, Friary and Portumna Town, to ensure that the visitor experience and yield is greater than the sum of the parts.

DZ3.6 Link to Lough Derg Visitor Experience Development Plan (2020-2024) proposals:

- All Lower Shannon experience development initiatives around Lough Derg should be aligned to the VEDP currently in progress.
- Support proposals for a network of camping/ RV sites, in suitable locations around Lough Derg.
- Development of Dromineer Sailing Training Hub, as centre of excellence for sail training and national and international sailing events, through enhanced experience development.
- Creation of linked boating experiences; support enterprises and clubs to deliver aligned visitor experiences at destinations around the lake; build on stories of Brian Ború; Iniscealtra and the pilgrim experience; trading on the Mighty Shannon; that leverage existing strengths.

6.0 Shannon: Strategic Initiatives



The Tourism Masterplan identifies the key issues and challenges for tourism development on the Shannon, as well as core attributes and themes that make the Shannon unique. The Masterplan defines seven inter-dependent Strategic Initiatives that will position the development of the Shannon over the coming 10 years, as a distinctive and sustainable tourist destination in to the future.

6.1 Strategic Initiatives for the Shannon

Emerging from the vision, issues and opportunities (Table 1) and thematic framework for the Shannon, seven interlinking **Strategic Initiatives** (SI1-SI7)) were defined to catalyse the recommendations of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan (Figure 17). These initiatives are designed to activate an integrated

framework for long-term destination building, creating conditions for experience development. Building on the inherent strengths of each Discovery Zone, the plan will create many reasons for visitors to stop and stay.

Figure 17 **Defining Strategic Initiatives for the Shannon**



SI1

6.2 Strategic Initiative 1: Communicating a Clear & Consistent Message

The Tourism Masterplan has defined a singular vision for the Shannon. It is essential that consistent communications and interpretation are developed to reflect this vision, aligned with that of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* – a vision that will be embedded and communicated consistently across all tourism strategies and development plans. The Shannon Thematic & Experiential Framework provides the foundations for delivery of interpretation across the Shannon region. Its use in communications and interpretation will be central to delivering a clear identity and consistent message. The emphasis on environmental care and sustainability in this Masterplan also has important implications for on-site communication.

6.2.1 A Singular Vision for the Shannon

The Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon has defined a singular vision for the region's sustainable tourism development (Section 3.2). It is essential that consistent communications and interpretation are developed to reflect this vision, aligned with that of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*. Importantly, all local authorities within the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway catchment, as well as Fáilte Ireland and other public bodies and agencies, must embrace and reflect this shared vision within their own tourism and development plans (print and digital media) to ensure it is consistently communicated across all platforms for the Hidden Heartlands.

6.2.2 Visual Representations of Shannon

The Shannon, with its three distinctive Discovery Zones, will be a central element of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands'* offering.

A cascade of visual representations, using professionally designed logos, that both distinguishes and embeds the inter-connectivity of the region (*Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*), sub-region (Shannon) and Discovery Zones will be required. Thus, interpretative signage for Discovery Zone 1, should cascade in the *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* - > Shannon - > DZ1 hierarchy. Any signage should be environmentally sensitive and not visually intrusive, minimising the impacts on each Shannon zone.

6.2.3 What is Interpretation?

Interpretation refers to on-site communication designed to enable visitors to better appreciate and understand the unique qualities of the Shannon and its 'spirit of place'. It is about stimulating awareness and curiosity while engaging visitors in a conversation about the Shannon.

Interpretation should be used strategically at a landscape scale to enhance visitors' experience of the Shannon, to provide information and relevant, evocative and memorable insights.

Interpretation should influence how visitors understand and build a relationship with the Shannon, what they do, where they go and what they talk about. Done well, it will contribute profoundly to making the place distinctive and memorable. This requires detailed site-based planning within a Shannon-wide framework.



Scarriff Harbour Festival.
© Waterways Ireland

6.2.4 Interpretation on the Shannon: landscape and local scales

Two scales of interpretation are required along the Shannon: **(i) local** and **(ii) Shannon-wide**. The local will focus on provision for visitors at a single site/l location. Strategically, it is important to supplement this with interpretation that presents the wider (landscape scale) perspective of the Shannon. The immediate priority is to create the Shannon-wide tier as the conceptual foundation to introduce visitors to its unique sense of place.

- (i) **Local Level** – resources should be allocated to build support for high-quality, local, on-site interpretation:
- Interpretation should be everywhere, at harbours, attractions, heritage sites, information centres etc, to ensure a memorable and strong sense of place is embedded within the visitor experience.
 - Linking with local artists, makers and performers to create attractive, unexpected interpretation.
 - Encourage diversity and creativity in how local Shannon stories are told.
 - Consistency in service offering and interpretation throughout the region.

(ii) **Shannon-wide interpretation interventions** – should include:

- A digital information portal for all information, happenings and events relating to the Shannon
- A high-quality interpretive map made widely available (in print and digital forms)
- A series of art installations or sculptures reflecting the character of the Shannon at key arrival points all along the river.

Different types of interpretation content and communication media are appropriate and helpful at different points in the visit journey. Many of the physical proposals in Table 7 below require to be linked to the proposals for waterside harbour enhancements under *Strategic Initiative 3* (Section 6.4.1) and the strategy for Shannon Towns & Villages under *Strategic Initiative 4* (Section 6.5).

Table 7 Interpretation and the Visitor Journey

Aim	Key tasks	Requirements
Arrival	Are we there yet? • Creating a clear sense of arrival • Being instantly recognisable as part Shannon • Reassuring visitors that the Shannon is an attractive place to visit	• Public artworks that conveys something of the spirit of place and local pride in it • Clear branded signage that reassures visitors their needs are understood • River views and access to river
Orientation	What can I do here? How do I get started? • Helping visitors to choose what they want to do and plan their visit • Providing geographical/spatial orientation. • Providing conceptual orientation (via interpretation themes) • Signposting sources of help, advice and information • Answering visitors' immediate questions	• Shared Shannon-wide collateral including portable maps (printed and digital) that show the whole Shannon • Panels and other visuals that show the whole Shannon • Shannon themes/ inspirers as single sentence/ visual orientation
Communicating Shannon Spirit of Place (river-wide)	What is special about the Shannon? • Building awareness of the whole river • Generating a clear identity that can be recognised	• Shannon-wide common visual identity • Fuller interpretation on Shannon Themes • River-wide interventions e.g. series of sculptural interventions; milestones; digital river voyage of songs, music and stories; linked events/festivals • Training and supports for providers in providing river-wide information
Communicating site-based stories and significance	What is special about this place? • Providing local stories and experiences relevant to location • Demonstrating how local content relates to Shannon-wide picture • Applying Shannon Themes and Inspirers consistently • Applying agreed quality standards appropriate for target visitors for all interpretation media	• High quality interpretation in range of media (including race to face) at sites • Site-based detailing of aspects of one or more of the Shannon themes/ inspirers • Local maps and guides • Training and supports for local providers in interpretation techniques



Into the blue.
© Waterways Ireland

6.2.5 Interpretation and Visitor Behaviour

High standards of environmental sustainability require a co-ordinated communication approach to positively influence visitor behaviour, with other visitor management measures:

- A **Shannon Code of Conduct**, based on the national *Leave No Trace* guidelines, encouraging positive behaviours and care for the Shannon Environment should be developed for local people and visitors.
- Will require a co-ordinated and long-term approach, rooted in **bespoke research** into visitors' behaviours, beliefs and motivations.

6.2.6 Interpretation Methods for the Shannon

Interpretation methods for the Shannon should embody a contemporary, fresh approach in terms of media selection, design, tone and content (see proposals in Appendix 4).

- ✓ It should emphasise **people, stories, evocative content and the many-faceted aspects of human interaction** with the Shannon.
- ✓ The media and content should show **high levels of environmental sensitivity**, in terms of materials (throughout the product life cycle) and visual impact.
- ✓ **Interpretation can be delivered in many ways**, it can be verbal or non-verbal, face to face or

impersonal, visual, auditory or multi-sensory.

- ✓ **Interpretation should be everywhere:** information at Shannon arrival points, artworks on the waterfront, inspirational stories at key locations, notes on a menu, conversation with the bar staff or the tour guide, the décor of the cabin or bedroom; all are part of interpreting the Shannon.
- ✓ Media selection for site-based interpretation will usually be **determined by local factors and resources**, as well as the constraints and opportunities of the site.
- ✓ Overall it would be highly desirable to see a **range of approaches at local level**, reflecting local diversity and character (see Appendix 4).

6.2.7 Marketing Strategy for the Shannon

The Shannon will require an integrated Marketing Strategy and allied resourcing, closely aligned with the themes and experiences proposed in the Masterplan.

This will be completed in accordance with the promotion and marketing of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* as an integrated thematic communications strategy for the region.

6.2.8 Proposed Projects to support delivery of S1 Communicating a Clear Message

S1.1 Vision for the Shannon aligned with Ireland's Hidden Heartlands;

Develop consistent communications and interpretation to reflect the shared vision, aligned with that of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands (IHH). All local authorities and statutory authorities to embrace and reflect this shared vision across all print and digital media platforms.

S1.2 Develop distinctive visual representation for Shannon:

Design a series of distinctive cascading logos to reflect the embedded, inter-linked nature of the IHH, Shannon and three Discovery Zones.

S1.3 Shannon Integrated Interpretation Strategy and Design Guide:

Develop Guide for co-ordinated landscape-scale interpretation for the Shannon, including interventions for interpretation for all stages of the visitor journey. Prepare detailed guidelines on appropriateness and use of a range of interpretation media and methods.

S1.4 Interpretation Planning:

All new experience and interpretation developments should include an *Interpretation Plan* aligned to the Shannon Integrated Interpretation Strategy

S1.5 Shannon Visitor Experience and Interpretation Toolkit:

Develop toolkit with linked training and supports for local providers and local guides should be developed to support shared standards of high-quality interpretation across the Shannon region.

S1.6 Environmental Code of Conduct:

Develop a Code of Conduct based on 'Leave No Trace' principles to highlight and encourage positive behaviours that reflect care for the Shannon environment for local people and visitors.

This should be accompanied by research and monitoring of visitor behaviours, beliefs and motivations.

S1.7 Marketing Requirements:

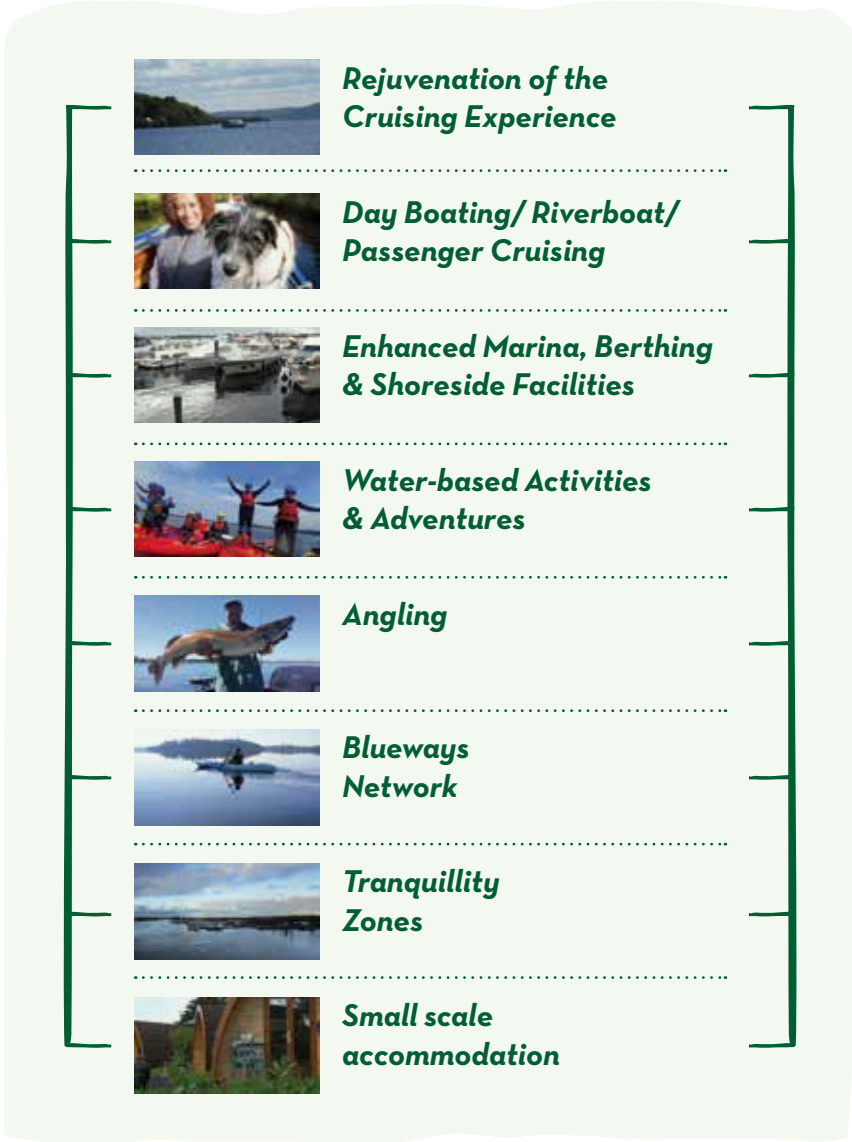
Integrated Marketing Strategy and allied resourcing, closely aligned with the themes and experiences proposed in the Masterplan.

Align with promotion and marketing of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* as part of an integrated thematic communications strategy for the region.

6.3 Strategic Initiative 2: Enhancing the On-Water Visitor Experience

On-water activities are the defining elements of the Shannon tourism proposition. Cruising on the Shannon offers an iconic experience for visitors to get on the water, but there are limited options for day boating or passenger cruising, as may be found on the waterways of Europe. There are well-established recreational, angling and blueways opportunities to get active ‘on-water’, but it may not be evident to a visitor as to how to access these. Additionally, many of the lesser-known spots along the Shannon offer superb opportunities for nature watching and ‘getting away from it all’. With imagination, these offerings may be expanded and enhanced over the term of the masterplan

The Shannon has the potential to provide many exciting opportunities to experience the open waters and wildlife of its lakes and rivers. A range of options for improved experiences include:



Sailing on Lough Ree. © Fáilte Ireland

6.3.1 Rejuvenation of Cruising Experience on the Shannon

A key USP and niche market of the Shannon over the past 50 years has been cruising on its open and relatively natural waters, attracting 18,000 -20,000 visitors each year, with an estimated annual value of €50m¹⁶. Additionally, the cruise fleet must respond to a growing time-poor, ‘short-break’ market. Cruise visitors tend to be an older (+45 years), higher spending cohort, where German and domestic markets are the strongest in terms of cruise holiday sales. When compared to other destinations, a visitor to the Shannon can enjoy unrivalled access to a largely unspoilt natural environment, a waterway that is uncongested and free from commercial traffic, as well as easy contact with friendly local people.

There has been very significant consolidation of the cruise hire fleet over the past decade, with a marked decline in available hire craft to 224 by 2018. A scheduled replacement and modernisation of the fleet is critically required as a focal area for the revitalisation and expansion of this unique Shannon experience. Linked to this is an opportunity to ‘green’ the fleet from diesel powered craft to more sustainable power¹⁷.

The rejuvenation of the hire cruise fleet may require incentivised capital investment aligned with the objectives of the Masterplan, with the aim of retaining this iconic element of the Shannon tourism mix. Collaboration among the relevant agencies and cruise trade will be critical in meeting these challenges.

¹⁶ Valuing Ireland’s Rural and Urban Inland Waterways (2016). Waterways Ireland. <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/about-us/research>

¹⁷ See Volume 3 Baseline Report for further discussion.



Clonmacnoise. © Chris Hill/Ireland’s Content Pool

6.3.2 Day Boating/ Riverboat/ Passenger Cruising

Easy access day boating would allow visitors to experience the freedom of the Shannon navigation. A new day boat hire company has recently opened in Belturbet (Aghinver Ltd), offering small self-drive boats suited to river/ canal and sheltered lake cruising. On Lough Erne, new product innovations like Erne Boat Hire Ltd provide small day boats allowing easier access; as well as paddle boards for rent in Enniskillen – this could be emulated at various points along the Shannon in villages and towns to allow people to easily access the water.

The reconfiguring of decommissioned cruise hire craft as day-boats was considered as a means to provide safe and cost-effective access along the Shannon for a fun-seeking, younger market, for short day-hire or weekend periods. Key criteria in considering the business viability for such a concept include the style, quality and cost of craft; optimisation of hub positioning; safety & insurance costs; staffing and transfers between bases. All such issues will require careful commercial consideration.

Cruising in a passenger vessel is an attractive proposition, popular across Europe, along the Rhine, Danube, Seine and other major rivers (see Volume 3, Baseline Report). This was considered as an option to provide scheduled visitor servicing along the River Shannon, allowing people to move more freely up and down the waterway.

There is currently a niche market for luxury hotel cruising experiences on the Shannon, exemplified by the MV ‘Shannon Princess’ multi-day, tailored cruise packages. There is potential scope to expand this offering as a high-end, high value experience, linked to onshore attractions, activities and exploration of the hinterland within the Shannon’s three Discovery Zones (see Chapter 5.0 above).

6.3.3 Marina, Berthing & Shoreside Facilities

The availability and quality of berthage and marinas underpin the cruise hire and general boating experience. There are 8,400 boats on the navigation (most in private ownership), with 4,500 berthing spaces across 58 locations along the navigation, which act as the interface between water and land. While the demand for mooring outweighs supply, there are variations across the navigation in the levels of demand.

Lock passage data of usage patterns along the navigation imply an increase in total activity from 42,700 to 45,500 boat passages over the 5-year period from 2014-2018. The Albert Lock is the most frequented between Dromod and Carrick on Shannon (the main hub for the cruise hire industry) followed by Athlone, Roosky and Clarendon Locks, while the least active locks are Sarsfield, Drumshanbo, Drumleague, Battlebridge, Clondara and Pollboy Locks. Berths can be scarce at particularly around peak season. The addition of a new jetty at Ballina on Lough Derg in April 2019 will create new opportunities to expand the cruising experience on the lake.

Service Block provision is in the main good; however, a review of the shore-based Service Block provision would be useful, taking account of customer requirements, as well as the use of smart technologies to enhance delivery and monitoring of usage patterns and behaviours. Improvements in this area will be linked to proposals for harbourside amenity enhancements (see Section 6.4.1).

6.3.4 Water-Based Activities & Adventure

There is a broad palette of water-based, 'soft adventure' activities available at many locations along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway, including swimming, diving, kayaking, canoeing, paddle-boarding, rowing, cable waterskiing and sailing, among others. These water-based pursuits offer intending visitors the opportunity to experience the 'fun' side of the Shannon. However, for many visitors to the Shannon, it is unclear where or how (or seasonally, when) to access these activities.

Up-to-date information must be provided on where to go, activities and amenities (family friendly zones, kit hire/ rentals, parking, picnicking, food, accommodation, guides), as well as tuition or summer camps within each of the Discovery Zones along the Shannon. Water safety information may be imparted through the same channels.

There is a network of guides available along the Shannon who may take people to lesser-explored nooks and crannies on e.g. kayaking or birdwatching trips. Additionally, many operators offer nature-based educational tours and explorations, which may introduce the visitor to learn more about the Shannon, its post-carbon initiatives and biodiversity measures being emplaced.

There is a series of commercially operated activity zones on Lough Derg (Twomilegate, Dromineer, Kilgarvan, Portumna), Lough Ree (Hodson Bay, Killinure Lough) and Lough Allen (Drumshanbo), among others, which offer safe, family-friendly 'splashy fun' and adventure, as well as opportunities to learn new water-based skills such as paddling or kayaking with professional supervision.

Improved networking and promotion of these guides and activity zones would enhance the Shannon's reputation for a range of nature-based and fun activities and increase the dwell times at key locations (see *Shannon 100* enterprise proposals – Section 6.8.2).

6.3.5 Angling

The unique appeal of angling on the Shannon / Shannon Erne Waterway includes open access to rivers, canals and lakes, with a variety of fish species available widely, with expert guides and convivial hospitality.

Inland Fisheries Ireland's draft *Angling Tourism Marketing Strategy* (IFI, 2019) highlighted that 135,000 international visitors participated in angling in 2017 (Fáilte Ireland, CSO), with an estimated spend of €280m p.a. Recreational angling in Ireland attracts over 400,000 participants and contributes €800m pa, supporting 11,000 jobs (ESRI 2016). Overseas anglers stay longer, are repeat visitors and spend more than the average visitor, contributing to seasonal and regional distribution.

Anglers form a distinctive market segment. There is potential to increase the footfall of specialised anglers who travel to Ireland for the primary purpose of fishing within certain angling disciplines or targeting of fish species e.g. Shannon's pike and coarse fish. If angling were bundled with other land- and water-based activities and experiences for accompanying families, children and non-specialists, the proposition could be broadened for greater appeal, attracting new types of visitors.

Additionally, the role of angling competitions is a key component in the promotion of Shannon angling to international visitors and building reputation.



Anglers of all abilities are welcome on the Shannon.
© Waterways Ireland

The IFI stresses this element and competitions are considered to be a key attractor of the angling offering along the Shannon, with broad seasonal appeal.

The IFI recommends the development of angling hubs with supporting angling and tourism services, at key locations along the waterways. Where appropriate, the IFI's selection of hubs should be consistent with the Shannon Masterplan's Destination Towns & Villages approach, to deliver improved all-round and integrated experiences, including angling festivals. The IFI's *Angling Tourism Marketing Strategy* will identify the future approach to identification of hubs and the promotion of angling along the Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway.

6.3.6 Blueways Network

A Blueway is defined as a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, both on and closely linked with the water, together with access to on-land activities and experience¹⁸. The Blueways Ireland brand is consistent with both the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Shannon objectives as it allows active exploration of nature within beautiful waterscapes, accessible to all abilities. The trails are designed to combine on-water and beside-water activities, within the context of places to stay, eat and go, that are enriched by local culture, heritage, arts and visitor attractions. Links with walking and cycling trails will expand opportunities for visitors to experience the rich wildlife and cultural heritage in the hinterlands of the Blueways.



Lough Derg blueway watersports, Kilgarvan Quay, Co Tipperary. © Brian Morrison

A Blueway Management and Development Guide¹⁹ was prepared for the development, management and promotion of Blueways. The related Accreditation Criteria for Blueways on the Island of Ireland combines a visitor-focused approach with fundamental safety, technical, access and environmental components. All are underpinned by sustainable management techniques and processes.

Further Blueway developments are being considered and prioritised by Waterways Ireland for:

- Lough Derg – Killaloe walkway
- O'Brien's Bridge and Errinagh Canal Canoe Trail
- Inner Lakes of Lough Ree
- Acres Lake to Lough Allen
- Lough Derg: Connacht Harbour to Portumna Castle
- Lough Key to Boyle, with linked cycling and outdoor activities.

The accreditation of the existing trails would be beneficial in supporting the promotion and optimisation of the existing and newly developed Blueway network over the medium term. There is also a need to develop and enhance the visitor awareness and experience of Blueway and Greenway opportunities in these areas, supported by business mentoring and engagement (see Section 6.8.1).

There is potential during the lifetime of the Masterplan to expand the Blueway network, based on assessment of the success of the current and proposed blueways.

¹⁸ www.bluewaysireland.org/

¹⁹ www.irishtrails.ie/Sport_Ireland_Trails/Blueways/

6.3.7 Tranquility zones

A tranquillity zone is defined by the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWI) as “locations where the boater can get away from it all’ and moor-up or anchor-out for a time and just relax”²⁰. There have been many studies into the restorative benefits of being in close proximity to water.

The IWI Tranquillity Special Interest Group has been working on this concept to map out locations on the Irish waterways network. The group aims to provide opportunities for boaters to experience the tranquillity of the waterway whilst having the facilities of a town or village accessible by dinghy. Referred to as ‘tranquil-lite moorings’ they are located close to the towns and or villages along the waterway.

There are designated Waterways Ireland moorings on Lough Derg, together with possible locations for tranquil moorings proposed by the IWI. Pilot ‘tranquil’ locations have been developed at Scariff River; Athlone; Killaloe and Portumna in the Lower and Mid Shannon and the IWI Tranquillity SIG plan to publish a guide displaying tranquil locations and ‘Tranquil Lite’ sites along the Shannon Waterway.

Subject to the results of the pilot tranquillity projects, agreed protocols will be required for these zones if they are rolled out along the Shannon²¹.

6.3.8 Small-Scale Accommodation

In some of Shannon’s rural destination villages and hubs, small-scale accommodation such as glamping, pods, or a combination of these as floating accommodation, can provide ecologically friendly accommodation solutions, as fun-filled experiences of outdoor camping, but with few of the weather worries. Innovative small-scale accommodation provides an excellent visitor experience, as a flexible array of pods, huts and B&B accommodation, within walking distance of the Shannon and village services.

The provision of serviced camp-sites and parking for mobile recreational vehicles (RVs) such as camper vans are also required for harbour sides, with access to serviced shower blocks. Such services may require planning policy changes, as has been achieved in other seaside counties. It is noted that additional resources will be required by the local authorities to maintain highest standards of such amenities.

Other opportunities that could be explored include sweat houses and/or conversion of decommissioned cruise boats, that could be docked permanently in suitable locations and offered as fun accommodation.

The development of sensitively sited, small scale accommodation or floating pods should be aligned with environmental and local planning requirements, as well as accreditation standards of Fáilte Ireland.

.....
20 www.iwai.ie/dublin/royal-canal-branch-submission-on-heritage-ireland-2030/

21 e.g. such zones exist in the National Park in Mecklenburg Lake District in Germany (prohibiting both cars and motor boats).

6.3.9 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI2 On-Water Experience

SI2.1 Cruising/ Day-Boating/ Passenger Cruising:

Carry out techno-economic feasibility study to examine viable rejuvenation & greening options for the cruise hire fleet; increase on-water access options through day-boat /passenger cruising.

SI2.2 Development of an additional Cruise Hire Hub(s) to ‘spread’ the options for on-water experiences.

Options to be assessed for technical, commercial and environmental feasibility including Tarmonbarry / Clondara, Killaloe, Athlone on Shannon and Ballinamore on Shannon-erne Waterway.

SI2.3 Marina Development:

Technical Assessment of Marina capacity to establish requirements for additional jetty space; consider options of Carrick on Shannon; Hodson Bay; Connaught Harbour; and new Marina in Parteen/Clariford. Consider enhanced jetty capacity up-and down-stream of Clonmacnoise at Athlone and Shannonbridge. Options must also be the subject of an environmental feasibility study.

Review shore-based Service Block provision; assess potential use of smart e-technologies to enhance delivery and monitoring of usage patterns.

SI2.4 Water-Based Activities & Adventure:

Provide timely visitor information on range of ‘soft adventure’ activities (swimming, rowing, sailing, kayaking, waterskiing etc), where to go and amenities within each of the Discovery Zones.

Develop improved networking and promotion of family-friendly activity zones (in association with the ‘Shannon 100’ network).

SI2.5 Angling:

Identify angling hubs in association with WWI/ IFI and FI, linked to the Shannon Towns and Villages strategy (SI3). Develop family-friendly angling experiences, linked to activities in nature. Angling hubs should be identified in tandem with appropriately defined environmental management standards.

SI2.6 Blueways:

The accreditation of the existing trails should be carried out with a view to supporting the promotion and optimisation of the existing and newly developed Blueway network over the medium term. Accreditation of blueways should ensure that measures to record and manage invasive species are being carried out.

SI2.7 Tranquillity Zones:

Pilot selected sites on the Shannon as tranquillity zones in the short term, with a view to extending along Shannon water bodies over the lifetime of the Masterplan. Future sites are likely to be undisturbed natural areas and options to provide tranquillity zones must be the subject of environmental assessment / appropriate assessment/ ecological impact assessment. A maximum number of tranquillity zones must be designated at any one time.

SI2.8 Small Scale Accommodation Options:

Define appropriate locations using a criteria-based approach, linked to Shannon Towns and Villages. Consider options for e.g. floating pods; glamping; & camp-sites; serviced parking and amenities for recreational vehicles subject to by-laws. To avoid over proliferation, appropriate locations should be defined within the relevant county development plan.

6.4 Strategic Initiative 3: Enhancing the Waterside Visitor Experience

The waterside experience is an integral part of the visitor’s enjoyment and Shannon-themed amenities should be developed to provide orientation, excellent marinas; fine food experiences at waterside restaurants and picnic areas; playgrounds and integrated walking/ cycling recreational infrastructure suited to the needs of a range of visitors. Public lands and buildings may be adapted to enhance recreational and accommodation amenities, creating linkages with waterside communities and hinterlands. Expansion of nature viewing and immersive opportunities would introduce visitors to some of Shannon’s more surprising and lesser known locations.

The Shannon has the potential to provide many exciting opportunities to experience the open waters and wildlife of its lakes and rivers. A range of options for improved experiences include:



6.4.1 Enhancing Harbourside Amenities & Infrastructure

Investing in Improvements to Harbour Infrastructure

Ongoing investment in harbour infrastructure is critically important to the sustained development of the boating and cruising tourism sectors along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway. Additionally, the industrial heritage of the harbours and waterways is of broad interest to both residents and visitors.

A programme of investment will be developed to include the upgrade of some harbours, the opening of new destinations and the possible restoration of some waterways. These will include technical and environmental feasibility studies to optimise the siting of new or expanding harbours; studies to determine the demand for restorative measures on older waterways; provision of additional jetty space, safety measures, navigational signage and related infrastructure. All of these measures will be aligned with the objectives of the masterplan and



Canal boats in harbour.
© Chris Hill/Ireland's Content Pool

may support the opening of new visitor destinations along the Shannon.

Amenities for Boat Users

Berthages and marinas provide the critical link between water- and land-based experiences. In general, visitor surveys have reported a positive attitude to the cruise hire experience and onshore services. However, a range of waterside harbour services should be provided that include:

- ✓ Adequate shore power (220V), with points adequately distributed along the Shannon; activated by digital service cards.
- ✓ Service blocks, spotless and fully functional.
- ✓ Well maintained and serviced pump out facilities, volumetrically sufficient to meet future needs;
- ✓ Regular refuse collection.
- ✓ Some of the very small berthing facilities should be maintained as such i.e. there should be access to moorings that are quiet, undeveloped and off the beaten track.

Harbourside Amenities and Development

The navigational infrastructure of the Shannon and associated public lands have a critical function in adding value to the tourism proposition. It requires a sustained investment programme, set within the context of tourism trends and strategic opportunities apparent in the wider masterplan area. Harbours together with adjacent public land can provide space for amenities, recreational infrastructure and enterprise development with links to the water, while creating new energy to bring these harbours to life. Public lands can also be used to facilitate harbourside enterprises such as boat rentals, clubs and other community activities i.e. utilising public lands as a platform for business

development. The provision of space/infrastructure for activity providers, clubs and communities to operate from should be an integral part of bringing our harbours to life.

Qualitative landside amenities and improvements could be achieved by:

- ✓ Enhanced public open space combined with quality public realm;
- ✓ Incorporation of standard 'Shannon branded' signage on the quaysides; with clear interpretation and information on activities and attractions;
- ✓ Provision of picnic areas and BBQ facilities;
- ✓ Play facilities and recreational linkages in the area;
- ✓ Provision of trailheads for walking and cycling routes, which link to other attractions;
- ✓ Water-side walks along designated tracks or boardwalks (e.g. Carrick on Shannon to Leitrim Village);
- ✓ Bike hire facilities at harbours;
- ✓ Charging points for e-cars;
- ✓ Parking and service sites for RV vehicles ('camper vans'); and
- ✓ Biosecurity measures for angling/boating access /egress to and from the waterways.

At the strategic masterplanning level, it is not possible to prescribe or identify specific locations where the quality of open space and waterside public realm needs to be improved. Thus, it is recommended that an audit should be undertaken with interventions prioritised, based on where the harbours are located with respect to the Shannon Destination Towns strategy (see Section 6.5 below).

6.4.2 Nature-Viewing in Shannon's Forests

There is a range of attractive forest parks and recreational sites, particularly suited to family activities, along the Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway corridors, with opportunities to experience nature directly. Waterside facilities of note include:

- **Lough Key Forest Park:** combines a host of adventure activities suitable for families. Plans are afoot to increase its recreational connectivity to historic Boyle and the Shannon.
- **Killykeen Forest Park:** along the Shannon Erne Waterway attracts 94,000 visitors per annum, offering walks and opportunities to explore nature along the waterways and woodlands.
- **Derrycarne:** a picturesque lakeside forest in Leitrim, with 'away from it all' forest walks.
- **Portlick Millenium Forest Walks:** nature walks on the eastern shores of Lough Ree.
- **Portumna Forest Park** on shores of Lough Derg, with walking, cycling, orienteering/ wheel-o; birdwatching, picnics, mountain biking and 'watchable wildlife' particularly suited to children and families; with strong walk/cycle links to Portumna marina and town's amenities.
- **Ballycuggaran:** with expansive views of Lough Derg, Ballycuggaran forest and mountain walks, with kayaking, rowing, swimming and canoeing adjacent to UL Activity Centre and Twomilegate amenity zone.
- **Castlelough Forest Park:** located on the Lough Derg Way from Tountinna mountain to Garrykennedy harbour, with its traditional pub offering music and foods. Adjacent to Castlelough amenity zone, with potential for enhanced water-based, family friendly activities.

The forests provide opportunities for families to immerse and explore off the beaten track locations, observing wild flowers, mixed varieties of trees in different seasons, migratory birds and dawn chorus in early Summer. In Shannon's forest parks, the lucky visitor might observe the majestic white-tailed eagle, or at many lakeshore wetlands, see spectacular starling murmurations in autumn. These forests highlight the positive opportunities for public lands to enhance the total visitor experience alongside the waterways. Coillte has recently

launched *Coillte Nature*, which sets out to protect sections of its estate for biodiversity and to provide a range of recreational opportunities.

There are additional short looped walks in many of the waterside towns and villages such as Athlone, Tarmonbarry, Dromod, Killaloe, Mountshannon and Carrick on Shannon, with opportunities to observe nature all year round.

6.4.3 Outdoor Activities in Shannon's Hinterlands

The hinterlands of the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway offer exceptional opportunities to experience nature through hiking, hillwalking and peatland exploration (in partnership with other public agencies such as Coillte, Bord na Móna and National Parks and Wildlife Service).

- **Discovery Zone 1:** visitors will enjoy hiking along the waymarked *Cavan Way, Leitrim Way, Miners' Way & Historical Trail*, and *Beara Breifne Way*, offering splendid vistas over Lough Allen, Lough Key and the upper Shannon, with opportunities to explore the geology, ecology and birdlife of the zone's 'away from it all' uplands.
- **Discovery Zone 2:** offers opportunities to explore the peatlands of Longford, Westmeath, Roscommon and Offaly, including trails at Corlea Trackway, The National Famine Way and Lough Boora Discovery Park, as well as meanders along the Grand Canal and Royal Canal. New opportunities to explore the unique ecology and rewilding measures of publicly owned peatlands will emerge as Bord na Móna ceases commercial production in the lifespan of the Masterplan. Tourism will contribute to vital economic regeneration in the post-peat period.
- **Discovery Zone 3:** visitors will enjoy nature-watching while hiking the *Beara Breifne Way* (including the *Hymany Way*), *Lough Derg Way* and *East Clare Way*, with spectacular views over Lough Derg and the lower Shannon at Ballycuggeran, Ogonelloe, Moylussa, Tountinna and the Portroe Look-Out, with perhaps a glimpse of the majestic white-tailed eagles or starling murmurations during the right season.

The strengthening and promotion of the *Beara Breifne Way* as a regional walking route; the Strokestown to Clondara *Famine Way* in Roscommon, and the emerging *Pilgrim Way*

showcasing the early Christian heritage of the Shannon, will provide key 'trails of scale' for visitors to engage actively in nature, while venturing through rural villages and towns within the Shannon hinterlands (see Section 6.7.2).

Adventurers along the *Shannon Erne Waterway, Royal Canal, Grand Canal* and the *National Cycleway* into the hinterlands of the Shannon will experience the superb wildlife and wetlands of Ireland's lakes, canals and midland bogs. Opportunities abound to experience the rewilding measures and attendant biodiversity enhancements to be undertaken in the coming decades (see Section 6.6 below).

6.4.4 Revitalisation of Lesser Used Waterways

There is an opportunity to identify and consider measures to rejuvenate and energise lesser used waterways such as the Errinagh Canal, the River Suck, the Boyle Canal and the Limerick Navigation. This can be achieved by revitalising their waterside and on-water offerings, as well as refocussed promotional efforts as part of the Masterplan.

The Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW) is a strategic waterbody linking the Shannon and the Erne systems, that was reopened 25 years ago as a major cross-border initiative. Despite early success and enterprise development, the SEW has seen a decline in boat traffic and visitor numbers in recent years²², although investment in a recreational Blueway has encouraged new walk/cycle activity based tourism along the waterway. As part of the masterplan, new promotional measures (linked to Lough Erne) are required.

The Royal Canal and Grand Canal are important gateways to the Shannon, with opportunities to link canal boat traffic from the Royal Canal and the Grand Canal via the Shannon, as a boating destination servicing the wider region. The boating experience along the canals is significantly different to the open waters of the Shannon and provide excellent immersive opportunities for visitors to the region.

The canals also direct walking/ cycling visitors into the region as Blueways. The re-energising of the Grand Canal will provide a direct link from Shannon Harbour to Lough Boora Discovery Park, opening opportunities to explore the peatlands. The Royal Canal will direct visitors to the upper Shannon via Ballymahon-Clondara, with circular links back to the Grand Canal southwards via Lough Ree on

the Shannon. The University of Limerick's strategic development plans will open tourism opportunities for the Errinagh Canal.

Many of the waterside and hinterland proposals under the Masterplan's Strategic Initiatives will encourage visitors to 'go off the beaten track' and discover the hidden treasures of the lesser known waterways, linked to the strategic objectives of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*.

6.4.5 Reimagining Shannon's Historic Buildings & Structures

There is a very significant resource of old canal stores, maltings, warehouses and hotels, linked to the Shannon's industrial and trading links to Dublin via the Grand and Royal Canals, many of which are held in public ownership.

The estate of Waterways Ireland also holds some of the most iconic buildings along the waterways, including lock-houses, gatekeepers' lodges and historic hotel, many of which have fallen into disuse (see Appendix A). Works associated with such upgrading and change of use must be undertaken in compliance with Planning & Development Act (2000 as amended) and in accordance with best conservation practice.

Options for historic buildings could include reimagined uses such as:

- Accommodation, as holiday apartments, B&B or hostels (e.g. *Lough Derg Lake Café in Dromineer*);
- Boutique Hotels, playing to their history and character (e.g. *modernisation of old canal hotels*).
- Café, restaurant, suited to family celebrations and events – even as 'pop-up' seasonal venues
- Art Galleries, museums, exhibition spaces for festivals (e.g. *Maltings building in Banagher, Napoleonic Fort at Shannonbridge*)
- Enterprise centres; incubation or training centres (e.g. *Limerick City quays*).

For these options to work, there needs to be enhanced visitor dwell-time to justify the requisite investment. Such investment may require fiscal incentives, using a criteria-based approach, tailored to the development needs of key Shannon Towns and Villages (see SI4, Section 6.5 below).

22 Based on lock passage data, Waterways Ireland.

6.4.6 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI3 Waterside Visitor Opportunities



SI3.1 Reimagining Harbour Facilities through Sustained Investment Programme

A programme of investment in harbour infrastructure will be developed to include the upgrade of some harbours, the opening of new destinations and the possible restoration of some waterways.

Enhancements of waterfront public realm, amenities and provision of onshore services, charging, pump out and power facilities; use smart technologies.

Use existing public infrastructure to stimulate enterprises and community activity.

Enhanced BBQ, picnic and playground amenities at harboursides on public lands.

Shoreside charging points for e-vehicles.

Create walk/cycle recreational linkages to settlements, attractions and things to see and do. Provision of serviced camping/ pod/ RV parking at harboursides.

Sustained investment in the harbour infrastructure to facilitate growth in tourism.



SI3.2 Nature-Viewing in Forests & Hinterlands

Identify potential for enhanced family-friendly outdoor recreational amenities and nature viewing experiences in the Forest Parks that punctuate the Shannon Corridor.

Strengthen and promote access to nature along the Beara Breifne Way, Famine Way and emerging Pilgrim Way, to provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy spectacular scenery while engaging with nature in the Shannon / Shannon Erne Waterway hinterlands.



SI3.3 Rejuvenation of Lesser Used Waterways

There is an opportunity to identify and consider measures to increase visitors and activity on waterways such as the Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW), the River Suck, the Boyle Canal and the Errinagh Canal, as well as the Royal and Grand Canals.

This can be achieved by management and refocussing promotional efforts as well as revitalising their potential for waterside, on-water and blueway experiences.



SI3.4 Reimagining Historic Buildings & Canal Structures

Define appropriate locations and opportunities for refurbishment of historic Shannon buildings linked to Destination Hub Towns and Villages strategies. All site specific proposals must comply with legislation applying to Protected Structures and National Monuments.

SI4

6.5 Strategic Initiative 4: Shannon Towns and Villages

The development of vibrant towns and villages is a priority for the masterplan, creating opportunities for visitors to dwell awhile along the waterways, to access excellent waterside dining, activities and accommodation, with opportunities to meet local people. Referred to collectively as the Shannon Towns and Villages, these centres will provide visitor orientation, access to key services and a series of focal points that should sit at the core of the Shannon experience. Shannon’s towns and villages also provide critical points of contact with local communities, where complementary culture and arts facilities can also be supported and enjoyed.

6.5.1 Requirements of Shannon’s Towns and Villages

For a tourist to consider a town as a destination where they would stay at least one night, it must broadly have:

- ✓ at least one attractor/asset that can drive demand
- ✓ a variety of things to do and see
- ✓ a variety of places to sleep and eat

Destination towns that provide a wide variety of products, services and experiences can increase visitor dwell time and expenditure in local businesses and communities. A town that hopes to attract staying visitors must provide sufficient attractions, activities and entertainment within the town itself to provide engagement for more than eleven hours a day, including three hours in the evening. Ideally, tourists will leave the town feeling there was more they could have done or seen – and are therefore eager to return for more.

In addition to core services (e.g. accommodation), a town needs to be able to serve up a menu of options some of which will be strong enough to motivate them to visit in the first place and others that will also satisfy their core needs (e.g. for entertainment, spending quality time with friends/ loved ones).

Factors that make a town a quality place for residents are also what makes a town a good place for tourists (Figure 18):

Figure 18 Factors that make a Town a Quality Place



In developing the capacity of key towns within the Shannon, we are tapping into potential tourism spend that is likely to result from the marketing and investment associated with Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Focusing on improving the visitor experience in towns also provides the opportunity to draw on existing funding streams such as the Rural Regeneration Fund.

A very important feature of waterside towns and villages which heightens their attractiveness for visitors, both domestic and overseas, is the ability to eat beside or overlooking the water. There are surprisingly few opportunities to do this along the Shannon or the Shannon-Erne Waterway. This must be a priority if the tourism potential of the Shannon is to be optimised. Local Authorities, in particular, should take a proactive position in their County Development Plans to facilitate waterside and water-view dining. To protect water quality, it is also important to ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place prior to major new developments and early consultation with Irish Water should be sought in this regard.

6.5.2 Shannon Towns & Villages

Although all towns and villages will have a collective role to play in developing the Shannon as a world class tourism destination, a hierarchy of destination towns and villages unique to the Shannon has been identified on the basis of capacity and potential to deliver the experiential framework for the masterplan area.

An additional differentiating factor is the need to build services from a low base in some cases, and for the towns themselves to act as destinations rather than transit zones, as has historically been the case. They need to provide a reason to stop, by showcasing a variety of compelling things to see and do, encourages visitors to stay longer. In addition to placemaking enhancements and the need for attractive and usable public realm, towns in Shannon Region must develop and emphasis links and use of the waterway.

To develop a Destination Strategy for the Shannon, three categories of towns along the waterway have been identified as:



Shannon Gateways: towns of scale just outside Shannon Corridor that act as gateway portals to the region



Shannon Hubs: towns offering year-round facilities at scale, at the core of each Discovery Zone



Shannon Towns & Villages: settlements with smaller scale seasonal facilities, offering high quality services and activities adjacent to waterways

These are designated as shown on Figure 19 overleaf.

Figure 19 **Shannon Gateways, Hub Towns & Villages**

Key

Shannon Destination Towns:

- Gateway Towns
- Hub Towns
- Towns
- Villages
- Road
- Canal

0 10 20km



6.5.3 Shannon Gateway Towns

Shannon gateways are towns of scale located just outside the Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway corridor and include:

- **Birr**
- **Nenagh**
- **Roscommon**
- **Longford**
- **Cavan**

As portals to the Shannon region, these gateway towns provide significant visitor services such as accommodation, food and drink, as well as critical access to public transport to major centres, with direct links to Dublin, Shannon and Knock Airports. These towns also provide ancillary experiences of cultural heritage, evening entertainment as well as opportunities to provide transport links to smaller settlements closer to the core masterplan area.

6.5.4 Shannon Hub Towns

The four most significant settlements of Carrick on Shannon, Athlone, Killaloe-Ballina and Limerick, at the core of the Discovery Zones along the Shannon, have been identified as having potential to provide year-round facilities at scale. From a tourism perspective, these settlements should act as the focal point for tourism and experience development to:

1. Maintain their existing role as destination towns within the region;
2. Expand visitor infrastructure in line with the carrying capacity of the residential population;
3. Improve urban areas, layout and public realm to support better integration with the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway;
4. Provide a wider range of harbourside and on-the-water activities and experiences; and
5. Above all, anchor and enhance access linkages with key attractions and proposed projects within each town's relevant Discovery Zone.

Development Opportunities in relation to Shannon Hubs



Carrick on Shannon is a regionally significant town on the River Shannon, at the confluence of counties Leitrim and Roscommon, within a transportation corridor of the N4, N5 and N61. The town could be described as the capital of the Shannon cruise hire industry and is a good example of a town that performs well in terms of the visitor offer.

The area is known for recreational, tourism and cultural facilities and the town intends plans to invest in the provision of additional quality recreational and cultural facilities. Strategic objectives for future development include redevelopment in the town core and opening access to the River Shannon via riverbank walks, with particular reference to a boardwalk linking northwards to Leitrim Village.

Carrick on Shannon is a key hub town at the core of Discovery Zone 1, providing critical accommodation, fine dining options, as well as cultural, heritage, music and drama experiences to visitors.



Athlone is a key access point to the Shannon from Dublin and Knock airports; the M4 Dublin-Galway, the Dublin-Galway rail and bus networks, and also the new National Cycleway. These links deliver visitors to the heart of the Shannon at Athlone. The town has focused on developing its waterfront, with plans for enhanced public realm in Burgess Park, as well as a new signature bridge to accommodate the National Cycleway crossing of the Shannon. The Athlone Canal Study provides for the regeneration of the canal zone, examining opportunities for increased walk/cycle movements along the canal for tourists.

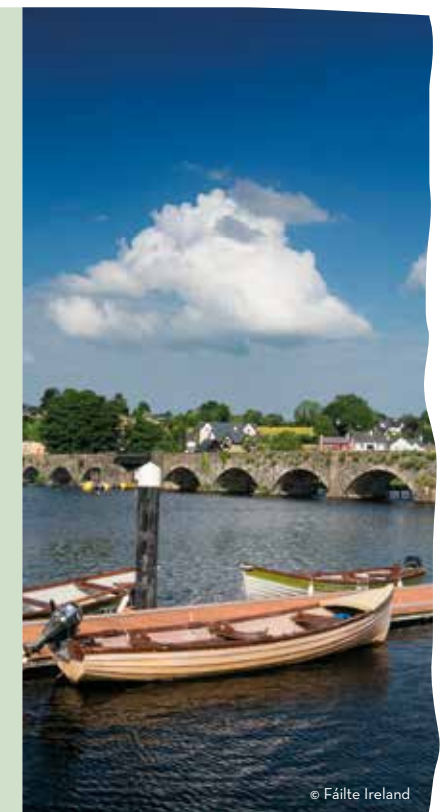
Signature waterside attractions such as Athlone Castle and the Luan Gallery have been successfully developed and substantially enhance the visitor experience. Athlone offers

vital direct access to the water via both river and lake, as a base for on-water activities, watersports and scheduled cruises and boat trips to Hodson Bay, the Lough Ree islands and southwards to Clonmacnoise.

Athlone is a regional growth centre at the core of Discovery Zone 2, offering a full range and selection of hotel accommodation, fine dining and a suite of cultural and musical experiences. The challenge is to hold visitors for longer and to direct them to compelling experiences in Athlone as well as into the hinterlands. It lies at the centre of the Hodson Bay, Glasson, Coosan, Killinure, Wineport, Portaneena, Ballinahown nexus, combining lakeshore accommodation, fine foods, crafts and water-based 'soft adventure' activities, offering a tourist centre of scale and complexity.

Killaloe and Ballina are twin towns, occupying a historically important bridging point on the Shannon at the southern narrows of Lough Derg, in highly scenic surrounds of the Arra / Bernagh Mountains. Killaloe acts as a 'Gateway to East Clare', while Ballina provides access from Tipperary/ Limerick on the M7, as well as proximity to Shannon Airport. These twin towns have traditionally been the focus of water-based tourism (cruising, boating, angling, swimming, water-skiing, rowing), Lough Derg Blueway, and a significant accommodation base and marina. The towns are springboards to key attractions such as Iniscealtra (Holy Island), Beál Ború, Ballycuggaran-Twomilegate activity zones, as well as service centres for the Lough Derg Way and East Clare Way, and the emergent Pilgrim Way.

A new bridge is being constructed south of the historical Killaloe-Ballina bridge and core to ease current traffic congestion. Post construction, the *Killaloe-Ballina Town Enhancement, Tourism and Mobility Plan* will facilitate a coordinated approach to public realm enhancements within both settlements to reflect their linked status. Growth and expansion of the tourism sector should be supported and there are several development sites which have been identified for potential tourism development in the future.



Development Opportunities in relation to Shannon Hubs



Limerick City is the only city located within the masterplan area and has a significant resident population together with access to an international airport, extensive public transport services and a wealth of accommodation and cultural assets. Although Limerick does not form part of the Shannon cruise hire itinerary, it is a significant destination in its own right.

Limerick's *Tourism Strategy's Theme (1 of 4) 'Into the Blue'* Action 1 proposes a Blueways Masterplan to prioritise infrastructural upgrades, creation of safe mooring points, enhanced navigational and recreational accessibility to the Shannon, to create waterside destinations, supported by riverside walks and cycleways. Additionally, Limerick City & County Council, in partnership with OPW, plan to develop a world class waterfront along the banks of the River Shannon in the heart of Limerick City. The partners will examine ways to bring the river closer to the City, while ensuring flood protection and reduced flooding risk. Access to the river will be developed and the Hunt Museum marina will be optimised. As part of the flood defensive works, greenway shared paths will be constructed all along the Shannon through the city. The focus on developing physical and experience development linkages with other parts of the masterplan area, particularly in the Lower Shannon, should be a priority.

Proposals to support Visitor Destination Development: SI4 Shannon Hub Towns

Each of the four Hub Towns has the potential to develop and explore tourism opportunities provided by their physical proximity to the Shannon and act as an anchor for visitors to its wider Discovery Zone.

While the Masterplan has identified some development opportunities in relation to each of these settlements, further analysis is required and where not already in place, a **Tourism Development Plan** should be prepared for each Hub Town.

6.5.5 Shannon Towns and Villages

Shannon Towns and Villages are settlements that have significant potential to add value to the visitor experience along the waterways. Low visitor numbers over the years have impacted on service provision and there is a need to build demand to achieve a critical mass of services.

Shannon Towns

Many Shannon towns are in need of regeneration with the obvious potential for tourism to act as the key driver in supporting more vibrant and diverse uses within town centres. They also have a wealth of historic features which, if restored and re-used, would provide a strong foundation for the authentic experience sought by domestic and overseas visitors alike.

Development Opportunities in relation to Shannon Towns



Ballyconnell is in northwest Cavan, close to the Fermanagh border, along the Woodford River part of the Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW) between Garadice Lough and Lough Erne, on the N87 between Belturbet and Swanlinbar. It is classified as a medium sized town in the Cavan County Development Plan. There are several new residential developments including apartment blocks along the river, with large housing estates and retail developments, as well as a large +400 bed hotel just outside the town.

Since the reopening of the SEW, trade activity with Northern Ireland, including tourist activities,

have expanded. The town's location within the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark means it has significant potential in the tourism and outdoor recreation sectors. Specific tourism objectives in the CDP include the creation of a linear park and wildlife corridor along the Woodford River banks; protection of 'all sites of archaeological, cultural and/or historic value' and enhancement of access to the SEW canal/ walkway area. Current works on the Ballyconnell - Ballyheedy Blueway have commenced, due for completion in 2020, which if ultimately extended to Belturbet will provide 40km of off-road walking/ cycling amenities.

Belturbet is located within the corridor of the Shannon Erne Waterway, north west of Cavan Town near the border with Co. Fermanagh, on the N3 Cavan to Ballyconnell route. It overlooks the River Erne which is a valued asset for the town. Specific objectives set out in Cavan County Development Plan include the development and expansion of the linear park and wildlife corridor along the length of the River Erne. From the perspective of tourism

activities, Belturbet's performance has been variable with the departure from the town of the Emerald Star/ Le Boat operation in 2013, although a new boat hire company, Aghinver, has recently commenced operation at the harbour. The Cavan Tourism Strategy 2017-2022 identifies support for the ongoing development of greenways such as the old rail link between Dromod, Ballinamore, Belturbet and Cavan town.

Development Opportunities in relation to Shannon Towns



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Boyle is the principal town of north County Roscommon and has suffered economic decline over the past two decades. It is connected by the Boyle River to the Shannon and by the Boyle Canal to Lough Arrow and Lough Key. It lies within 6km of Lough Key Forest Park. Boyle is leading out on strategies for towns along the Shannon Navigation with Boyle 2040, a plan which addresses the challenges for town in adapting to new roles and a new identity and creating a re-imagined town centre. Under the objective of 'Strengthening the Boyle-Lough Key Connection' it envisages a mutually beneficial shared future, delivered through strategic infrastructural improvements and redevelopment projects. Future opportunities to enhance synergies between Lough Key and Boyle Town should improve access by water.



© Aislinn O'Brien, SLR

Tarmonbarry - Clondara Tarmonbarry is situated at a strategic crossing point of the River Shannon, on the N5 between Longford and Strokestown. The development focus for Tarmonbarry as established by Roscommon County Council is to upgrade and expand the current tourism infrastructure and offering of appropriate scale, to capitalise on water-based tourism and transport.

Tarmonbarry's 'twin' town Clondara, is significantly located at the junction of the Royal Canal and the River Shannon in County Longford. The Royal Canal Greenway and the opportunity for boaters/ cyclists and walkers to make an onward journey to or from Dublin, elevates both locations as a strategic point for tourism development within the masterplan area.

Lanesborough / Ballyleague Lanesborough is a village which has developed as a crossing point of the River Shannon at the north end of Lough Ree. Its twin village is Ballyleague on the Roscommon side of the river. Longford County Council supports the maintenance and growth of water tourism by sustainably developing the infrastructure on watercourses and the development of Lanesborough as a premier water recreation and angling destination. The council has several development objectives in relation to waterway development including facilitating the development of Blueways (Shannon-Lough Ree Canoe Blueway from River Inny to Lanesborough).

Development Opportunities in relation to Shannon Towns



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Ballinasloe is an important sub-regional town in East Galway and occupies a strategic transportation location adjacent to the M6 National Primary route linking Dublin and Galway. The town is well serviced with daily public transport services (both rail and bus) to Galway, Athlone and Dublin. The town hosts the annual October Horse Fair, an extravaganza of all things equestrian, with entertainment, music and great family fun.

The recently constructed public marina and associated developments along the River Suck now make it possible for cruisers to travel from the Shannon and berth in Ballinasloe. Ballinasloe is also located on the *Suck Valley Way*, part of the *Beara Breifne Way* long-distance walking route. There is scope to continue tourism development linked to the Shannon, focusing on the cultural, built and natural heritage of the town and its environs, including the western Grand Canal link to the Shannon.



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Banagher is an important sub-regional town in West Offaly, providing a well-developed centre for boat traffic along the River Shannon between Clonmacnoise and Portumna. It provides one of three cruise hire hubs along the entire waterway. The presence of an activity adventure hub and its proximity to the navigable Grand Canal at Shannon Harbour (with links to *Lough Boora Discovery Park* and onwards to Dublin) also complements the offer of the town. There are several significant historic buildings in Banagher (the Royal Shannon Hotel, Banagher Billiard Hall and the Bridge Malt House) as well as Napoleonic links to Shannonbridge,

whose appropriate redevelopment and restoration would provide a significant boost to the attractiveness and authenticity of the experience within the town centre. Banagher, together with the village of Shannonbridge to the north, provide the closest settlements to the iconic monastic complex at Clonmacnoise.

Offaly County Council has recognised the importance of the River Shannon-Clonmacnoise nexus and is exploring options to encourage the development of additional visitor services such as 'park'n'float' and/ or bike hire through a Visitor Management Plan for Clonmacnoise.

Development Opportunities in relation to Shannon Towns



Portumna is a historic market town in East Galway, located at a strategic crossing point on the Shannon at the north end of Lough Derg. Tourism aspects of the town remain largely undeveloped, and there is a significant opportunity to expand and promote the tourism base of the area.

The town sits at the confluence of the River Shannon and Lough Derg, adjacent to Coillte's Portumna Forest Park. Enhancement of Portumna's relationship with Lough Derg in the vicinity of Portumna Quay and the River Shannon at Connaught Harbour should be explored further. Other assets including Portumna Castle, the Friary, the Famine Workhouse and the Hymany Way (a section of the Beara Breifne Way) which starts in Portumna and continues onwards to Meelick and Ballinasloe in east Galway.

To address constraints in relation to land use along the river, imaginative proposals that are also consistent with the provisions and requirements of the flood risk planning guidelines should be identified. The Portumna Eco Tourism Destination Masterplan sets a vision for the town to become a leading sustainable tourism destination, and includes proposals for a Portumna Way, Walk/Cycle Loop Development and the creation of a flagship Adrenaline Park.

Proposals to support SI4: Shannon Towns

Due to their close proximity to the Shannon, each Town has the potential to provide integrated activities and services to enhance the tourism experience of the waterways and connection to their hinterlands. The Masterplan proposes strategic initiatives to support the reimagining of the tourism offering in each Shannon Town.

Proposals to support SI4: Shannon Villages

The offer within the many villages along the Shannon / Shannon Erne Waterway corridor is a particular strength within the masterplan area. Villages should be focused on seasonal necessities and maintaining and developing high-quality destination food and drink experiences, as well as opportunities to recreate on the water.

The strategy for Shannon Villages is to:

- ✓ Establish the need for improved interface between waterway and public realm, enhanced wayfinding as well as playground and BBQ facilities
- ✓ Assess the potential for the provision of more walks along the rivers and lakes i.e. within a short distance from the mooring or jetty
- ✓ Provide information on 'what's on' in the local area - branded Shannon map board at the jetty/harbour showing nature, activities, landmarks or points of interest.
- ✓ Facilitate the availability of berthage for visiting boats particularly where 'harbour hogging' is an issue;
- ✓ Facilitate opportunities to access the water for recreation (swimming, rowing, paddling, sailing, etc) and for boating on a short term basis i.e. day boat hire (see Section 6.3.2).
- ✓ Accommodate signature points of interest, including a Shannon Sculpture Trail, greenways, cycle trails etc.



Riverfest, Limerick.
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6.5.6 Festivals and Events

Festival and events will provide a wonderful mechanism to enhance Shannon's towns and villages, through themed exhibitions, performances, concerts, water festivals or foods. Festivals are an important mechanism to engage visitors in both Irish contemporary culture and traditions

Festivals and participative events are an important component of the Irish tourism product, providing opportunities to showcase culture, people and places.

Fáilte Ireland, in Guidance for Developing Tourism Destination Towns

The Shannon currently enjoys a commendable programme of festivals throughout the year, including water-based activity and family festivals; angling; walking; cycling; triathlons; trad music; literature; sailing; food and community events. Festivals enliven the evening entertainment menu in towns and villages, while supporting the creativity of local artists and festival programmers.

However, there is rare contact among festival organisers along the Shannon in terms of programming, scheduling or networking; and many have a local/regional focus versus an international target market. By strengthening the programme to become more ambitious and 'Shannon-focused', there is potential to create a strong awareness of the destination. This would provide a 'gateway' for new visitors, offering lots of things to see and do, while creating memorable festival experiences that are unique to the Shannon.

During the thematic consultations, it was evident that a significant number of communities and enterprises were keen to build linkages and the idea of a 'rolling wave' of themed festivals along the Shannon emerged. Some 'all-Shannon' thematic and experiential concepts emerged from these discussions (Table 8):

Table 8 Themed Experiential Concepts for All-Shannon Festivals

Concept, Festival Name	Themes/ Inspirers	Festival Concept
Shannon Wet’n’Wild Festivals of Outdoor Fun	Natural Shannon; Journeys & Adventures; Contact with Water	Focus on Shannon’s expanses of wetlands and boglands, with year-long programme of activities of <i>Bike, Hike, Pike, Paddle, Swim, Splash</i> – experience Ireland’s hidden heartlands from the outdoors in!
The Shannon ‘Rolling Wave’ Festival of Arts	Timeless Shannon Relating to the Whole River	Identify a series of waterside performances and linked arts events, working with Athlone’s Luan and Limerick City Galleries. Develop links to and from the <i>Riverfest Limerick, Boyle International Arts, Carrick Music Sessions, Athlone International Drama Festival, Portumna Cruinniu, Mountshannon Arts Festival, CastleFest, Dromineer Nenagh Literary Festival, BLAS Trad Fest</i> , among many others.
From the Source to the Sea: the Shannon Descent	Shannon Journeys & Adventures; Contact with Water	Staged series of ‘canoe / kayak descents’ from Leitrim to Limerick along the Shannon Blueways network – building a series of adventure challenges.
The Shannon Rally of historic boats	Timeless Shannon; Journeys & Adventures; Slow; Contact with Water	Strengthen and extend the traditional rally of the Shannon Barges and celebrate the unique industrial and trading heritage of the River and connecting Grand and Royal Canals. Heritage Boat Association Rally along all the major Shannon lakes.
International Shannon Angling Festival	Natural Shannon; Adventures; Slow; Contact with Water	Celebrate the rise of the Mayfly and the Shannon brown trout; host international and inter-lake angling competitions on Loughs Allen, Key, Ree & Derg.
‘Taste the Shannon’ Foods & Drinks Festivals	Timeless Shannon; Relating to Whole River; Contact with local people	<i>Roscommon Lamb Festival; Longford Harvest Festival; A Taste of Cavan; A Taste of Westmeath; A Taste of Lough Derg</i> ; as well as craft breweries, gin distilling in Lanesborough; and many more local and organic farm foods to savour along the length of the Shannon.

It is suggested that the final configuration of these (or other collaborative festival options) be decided as a priority by the Shannon 100 enterprise network (see SI7 – Section 6.8.2).

6.5.7 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI4 Shannon’s Towns & Villages

SI4.1 Shannon Hubs

- Enhance their existing role as hub towns within the Discovery Zones;
- Expand visitor infrastructure aligned with carrying capacity of residential population;
- Improve urban layout & public realm for better integration with the Shannon and SEW;
- Provide a wider range of on-the-water and links to beside-water activities; and
- Anchor and enhance access linkages with key attractions and proposed projects within the towns’ hinterlands in the relevant Discovery Zone.
- Where not already in place, Shannon-themed visitor experience development plans (VEDPs) should be prepared for these hubs.

SI4.2 Shannon Towns

Each smaller town has the potential to develop and explore tourism opportunities provided by their physical proximity to the Shannon. While the Masterplan has identified some development opportunities in relation to each of these settlements, further analysis is required.

Where not already in place, Shannon-themed Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) should be prepared for the Hubs.

SI4.3 Shannon Villages

- Improve interface between waterway and public realm; wayfinding, playground, BBQ facilities.
- Assess provision of walks along rivers and lakes, within a short distance from mooring or jetty
- Provide information on ‘what’s on’ in the local area – branded Shannon map board at the jetty/ harbour showing nature, activities, landmarks or points of interest.
- Capitalise on the strengths of food and drink offer in the locality;
- Facilitate increased availability of berthage for visiting boats
- Facilitate opportunities to access on-water recreation and boating on a short term basis
- Accommodate signature points of interest, including a Shannon Sculpture Trail, with linked greenways, cycle trails.

SI4.4 Shannon Festivals and Events

Develop an integrated calendar of Shannon-themed festivals, centred on water, culture, arts, foods, music and activities that allow visitors to experience the full range of Shannon’s unique culture and heritage.

Working with the Shannon 100 enterprise and community networks (SI7), to provide support to professionalise, enhance and grow a series of internationally attractive festivals delivering highest quality experiences to visitors. Appropriate environmental management protocols with respect to activities, resource use and waste reduction should be in place once the calendar has been agreed.

6.6 Strategic Initiative 5: Protecting & Enhancing the Shannon Environment

The Shannon comprises a unique mosaic of upland, terrestrial and aquatic environments, supporting a variety of habitats and species that are significant on a national as well as European level. The consultation process reinforced the value that communities, landowners, agencies and tourism enterprises place on the Shannon's flora, fauna and landscapes. A fundamental requirement of enhancing the Shannon visitor experience in sensitive environments is the minimisation of the impact on the receiving environment, while creating opportunities to both experience and appreciate nature.

The following measures are considered in the context enhancing Shannon's unique and special environments and minimising the impacts of tourism development in the coming decades:



6.6.1 An Ecotourism Approach across the Masterplan Area

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that has been defined as “ecotourism which actively contributes to the protection of natural heritage” according to the World Ecotourism Summit.

Based on the outstanding environmental qualities of the Shannon, there is significant merit in developing the region as a model of ecologically sustainable tourism. A practical toolkit should be developed to guide practice across the region and minimise any potential effects on the environment. Adopting the ‘Leave No Trace’ code of practice will be essential to supporting a sustainable tourism destination.

The concept of ‘slow tourism’ is complementary to ecotourism. Collaborative enterprises such as the award-winning ‘Slow Adventure’ network in Leitrim exemplify nature-based tourism through guided activities, walking and foraging, linked to environmental appreciation. The EU ‘Slow Adventure’ network with Leitrim Tourism as the Irish partner, is a model for sustainable tourism, creating connections through exploration of nature, the broader elements of which are suited to the Shannon.

There is scope to expand such offerings throughout the Shannon region to ensure that increased tourism activity is linked to environmental appreciation and ecological awareness of Shannon's hidden places. Key to enhancing such awareness is networking of activity operators (see Strategic Initiative 7) and promotion of responsible behaviours by service providers, residents and visitors alike through an agreed Code of Practice (see Section 6.2 above).

6.6.2 Destination Development and Rewilding Plan to develop access to Shannon Peatlands

The multi-party ‘Spirit Level’ study (2018)²³ reimagined the future of the wetlands and raised bogs of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Roscommon across the Bord na Móna peatland estate in the post-commercial extraction (2030+) period. For the Shannon Masterplan, there is scope to develop a green/ blue off-road network “within,

between and across” wet and wild peatlands for an exceptional visitor experience.

Subject to partner agreement, there is ‘significant’ scope to develop a world class, outdoor ‘access to nature’ experiences in this expansive area, linked to research, education and summer schools on positive climate mitigation measures. *Lough Boora Discovery Park* focused on exploration of Offaly's boglands, attracting over 100,000 visitors annually, is an excellent model of a creative approach that is well integrated with the local community. The annual *Lough Ree Environmental Summer School* at Lanesborough also engages visitors in active exploration of the Shannon's natural environments.

THERE IS SCOPE TO DEVELOP A GREEN/ BLUE OFF-ROAD NETWORK “WITHIN, BETWEEN AND ACROSS” WET AND WILD PEATLANDS, CARRYING VISITORS DEEP INTO THE HEART OF THE SHANNON'S RAISED BOGS, ALLOWING FULL APPRECIATION OF NATURAL SHANNON'S WILD SPACES.

A **Destination Development and Rewilding Plan** encompassing habitat regeneration, rewilding and future habitat management together with the identification of a range of visitor and educational experiences should be prepared to further the regeneration of the Shannon's Peatlands. This will contribute to national climate mitigation strategies, research and actions. This plan should be developed with, and embedded in, local communities, learning from ‘The Living Bog’ EU LIFE bog restoration project, where twelve raised bogs are being restored, one of which (Mongan Bog, Co. Offaly) lies within the Masterplan area²⁴.

²³ Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon ‘Spirit Level’ – op. cit.

²⁴ see <http://raisedbogs.ie>

6.6.3 UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree and Environs

The Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht (Heritage Division), in liaison with the relevant Local Authorities, is considering the concept of a UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree and its environs, to reflect the importance of its ecosystems. The focus of a UNESCO Biosphere is primarily on conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity; while fostering sustainable communities and enterprises, as well as education, training and research to support conservation and sustainable development.

The ambition of the masterplan is to integrate the efforts of key stakeholders, including landowners, in sustainable development, socio-economic enhancement and tourism related amenities. Ultimately, the biosphere will create opportunities for local guides and enterprises to deliver active nature experiences for visitors to the Shannon.

Development of a Lough Ree biosphere would require partnership among landowners, the agencies, the boating/ cruise hire industries and other water-based users.

6.6.4 Biosecurity Measures for the Shannon

Formal biosecurity standards for the inland waterways, to prevent the inadvertent disruption of the Shannon's natural ecosystems are required across the masterplan area. Draft standards were developed as part of this masterplan, which focus on communications, freshwater security measures for small boats and standards for leisure and industrial craft entering the system.

The introduction of Biosecurity Facilities at Designated Entry Points should be considered for all users along the Shannon to reduce the risk of further introduction or spread of invasive species. These should include:

- ✓ anti-fouling stations for routine boat cleansing procedures;
- ✓ cleansing / power washing stations for incoming / outgoing craft;
- ✓ well placed and well serviced pumping stations to prevent unlicensed bilge discharge; and
- ✓ spot inspections by licensed navigation staff.

6.6.5 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI5 Enhancing the Shannon Environment



SI5.1 Adopting an Ecotourism Approach

Establishing a ecotourism toolkit for tourism businesses and code of practice will be essential to becoming a sustainable tourism destination.

Develop 'slow tourism' opportunities, allowing visitors to enjoy activities and nature at a slower pace, building appreciation of Shannon's hidden places.



SI5.2 Destination Development and Rewilding Plan

To develop access to Shannon Peatlands as well as rewilding, regeneration and recreational proposals, whilst also ensuring that potential issues around access and ecologically sensitive sites are managed effectively.



SI5.3 UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree & Environs

Explore the potential for a UNESCO Biosphere Designation for Lough Ree and its environs, through consultations and partnership, for delivery of a zonal biosphere that will enhance the environmental status and create opportunities for low impact, nature-based tourism experiences.



SI5.4 Biosecurity Measures

Establish Biosecurity Standards to be used by all craft on the Shannon.

Establish Biosecurity Facilities at Designated Entry points, with spot inspections by licensed navigation staff.



SI5.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitor the impacts of the various sustainability measures over the timeframe of the Masterplan.

Modify strategies to enhance the Shannon environment, where feasible.

6.7 Strategic Initiative 5: Improving Connectivity

The Shannon has traditionally served as a major boundary between the east and west of Ireland, with the most significant settlements focused on east-west bridging points. The resultant weak north-south connectivity is a disincentive for visitors who need ease of navigation to activities and attractions. Improving access throughout the Shannon by all modes of transport is crucial to optimising access to its varied cultural and natural assets, as well as opportunities to become ‘active in nature’. Enhanced connectivity will support better visitor experiences and longer dwell times. Access will also encourage travel to less visited rural areas, providing opportunities for local enterprises and communities.



6.7.1 Encouraging Sustainable & Slow Travel

The masterplan is committed to encouraging and promoting sustainable travel throughout the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway region, with particular reference to the use of walking/ cycling/ boating infrastructure; use of public transport and expanded Local Link networks.

Several strategic options were considered to improve connectivity along the Shannon and to encourage distribution of visitors along the waterways and within the Shannon hinterlands, promoting longer dwell times.

A monitoring programme will be established among Shannon’s ten Local Authorities, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and National Roads Authority (NRA) to monitor traffic movement and flows within the region and to identify and support actions to mitigate unsustainable travel patterns.

Encouraging On-Water Slow Travel

Strategic Initiative 2 considered the potential for enhanced on-water cruising and boating visitor experiences (SI2 – Section 6.3). The feasibility of offering scheduled boat trips will be examined under SI2 proposals.

Subject to feasibility analysis, a unique element of the future Shannon experience could be the creation of both intra- and inter-Discovery Zone scheduled water-based transport links. This would offer visitors the opportunity to voyage across e.g. Lough Derg to visit other waterside villages or attractions, or take a slow boat trip along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway to designated harbour destinations.

6.7.2 Priority Network of Walking & Cycling Trails

Various types of walking and cycling trails already exist, are planned or are in development along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway, some of which are already developed or at a very advanced stage of planning, such as the remaining sections of the east-west National Cycleway route (see Figure 20)²⁵.

The masterplan considered planned or proposed trails which would offer strategic connectivity and exceptional opportunities for visitors to ‘be active in nature’ in some of the most hidden landscapes in *Ireland’s Hidden Heartland*; priority routes that could address any gaps in delivering the masterplan objectives.

The development of a series of linking north-south/ east-west inter-county trails within the Shannon area were prioritised using the following indicative criteria to filter out strategic routes:

- ✓ The trail should provide a link to / between Shannon Gateways, Hubs, Towns and Villages;
- ✓ The trail should provide a link to public transport (train stations in particular, since bicycles are permitted on Irish Rail services);
- ✓ The trail should link to existing trails / greenways; and
- ✓ The trail should provide links to other significant or planned routes, in particular the Dublin to Galway National Cycleway (a designated *Euro Velo* route) which bisects the Shannon region.

An indicative selection of priority trails that meet these criteria were identified (see Appendix 3), but will require detailed technical, economic and environmental assessment, subject to feasibility and prioritisation for development. All trails must be considered in the light of the National Trails Office guidance and standards²⁶, as well as national strategy for Greenway developments²⁷.

Other priority trails may be identified within the timeframe of the masterplan.

‘Trails of scale’ such as the *Beara Breifne Way*; the *Royal Canal* and *Grand Canal Greenways* and emerging routes such as the *Pilgrim Way* and *Shannon Greenway* will provide visitors with a range of multi-day walking/ cycling options within the Shannon region.

There are also opportunities to develop a network of interlinked ‘peatways’ by reusing existing turbary access tracks and bog railway lines across previously worked peatlands across Discovery Zone 2. Further analysis is required with key partners, including Bord na Móna, NPWS and the relevant local authorities, to establish immersive nature trails and discovery zones, while linking to existing trails, key attractions and towns/ villages where possible.

6.7.3 Public Transport Access

Generally, there are good public transport connections via bus and rail to the Shannon Region. In particular, the Shannon Hub Towns of Carrick on Shannon, Athlone and Limerick and the Gateways of Longford, Roscommon and Nenagh are well served by bus and rail services running east-west between Dublin and the west of Ireland. Some of the intercity public transport services also provide good connectivity to smaller towns and villages such as Belturbet, Dromod and Tarmonbarry.

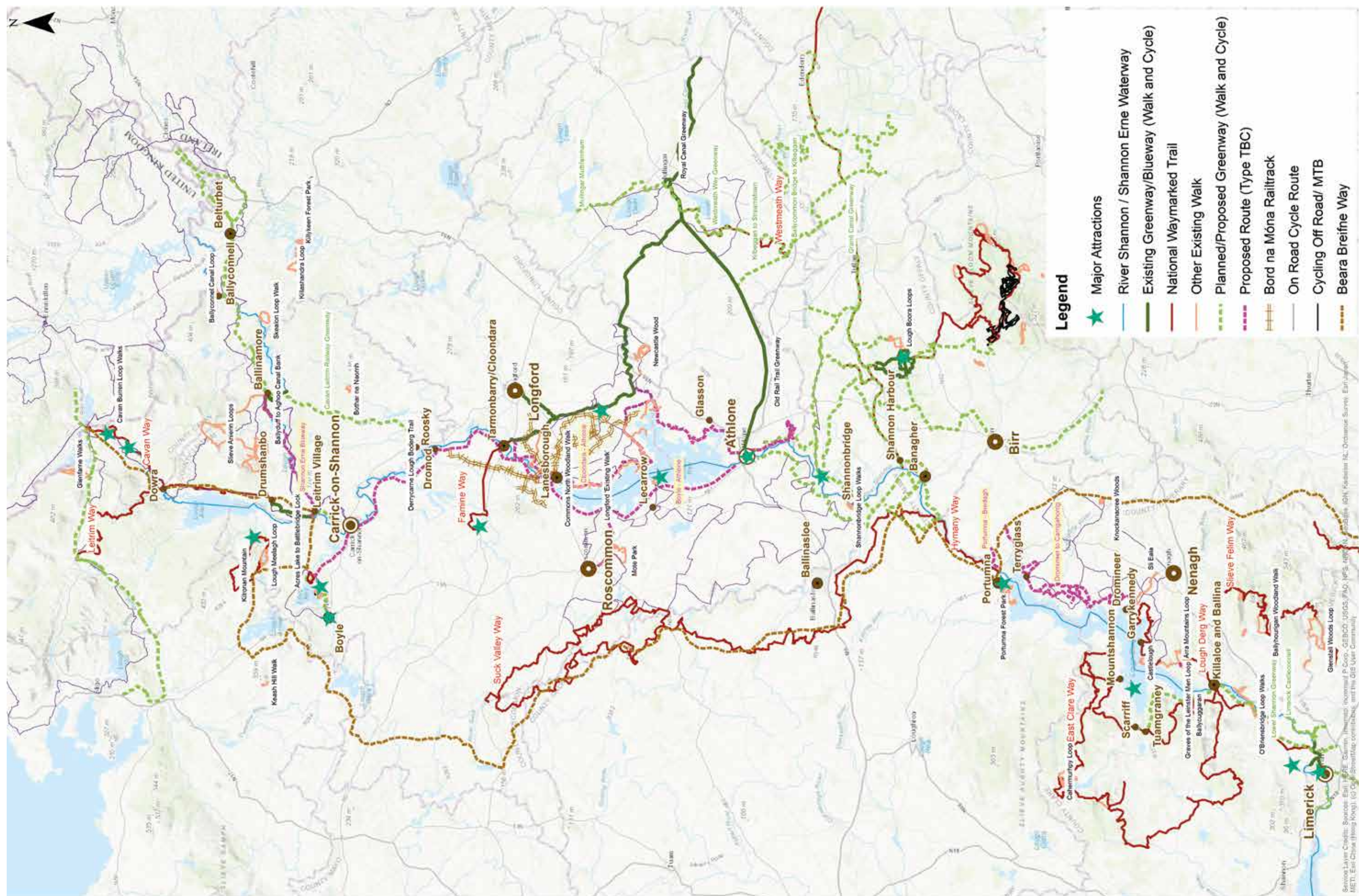
Public transport to the Shannon Villages and major attractions is less well developed, with services limited in places. North-south public transport connectivity for travel within/around the Shannon itself is more limited, particularly in the central section between Longford and Nenagh. North-south trips can be made using Bus Eireann Regional services, and/or, in some cases, ‘Local Link’ services, but operating frequencies on these services vary significantly and are lower than Intercity services.

25 Collation of Walking /Cycling infrastructure (existing, planned, in development) based on data as supplied by National Trails Office of Sport Ireland and Shannon’s Local Authorities, 2019.

26 https://www.irishtrails.ie/Sport_Ireland_Trails/Publications/Trail_Development/A_Guide_to_Planning_and_Developing_Recreational_Trails_in_Ireland.pdf

27 http://www.smartertravel.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2017_05_19%20Publication%20Version_O.pdf

Figure 20 Map of Shannon Walking & Cycling Trail Infrastructure, 2019





Boardwalk at Acres Lake on the Shannon, Co. Leitrim.
© Waterways Ireland

Public transport connectivity also appears to be weak for several specific pairs of destinations on the north south axis, while a few other settlements located on Blueways also have no, or very limited, public transport services, including a number of Shannon hubs and villages.

There needs to be easily accessible and up-to-date information, with consistent branding, on all transport options along the Shannon, Shannon Erne Waterway and their hinterlands.

6.7.4 Improving Existing Local Link Routes

Existing Local Link services provide vital connectivity to many destinations and attractions within the Shannon Region, but a number of these services operate a limited week day service or no weekend or no Sunday service. It is recommended that discussion is undertaken with the NTA, Local Transport Coordination Units (LCTU) and local tourism stakeholders to identify if any of these services can be enhanced during peak visitor periods to allow additional connectivity in the Shannon Region e.g. to meet boat transport schedules (Section O).

The limited frequency offered on the existing Bus Eireann Regional bus service between Longford and Athlone is a barrier to north-south travel within the Mid Shannon Discovery Zone and the region

generally. It is recommended that engagement takes place with the NTA to investigate the possible viability of increasing the number of Local Link services on this route (pilot summer months) which could include, e.g. an additional service in the Athlone - Longford direction in the evening and/or Sunday service in each direction.

Potential New Local Link Routes

Based on a gap analysis of public transport services within the Shannon Region, it is recommended that consideration is given to developing three new Shannon Local Link services, connecting the Shannon Gateways, Hubs, and Towns and Villages to the Shannon harbours, as follows:

1. Athlone - Clonmacnoise - Shannonbridge - Banagher - Portumna - North- south link that provides connectivity to 2 of the 3 main boat hire locations from the destination town of Athlone that is on the rail network as well as having excellent bus connectivity providing easy access for visitors.
2. Portumna - Terryglass - Nenagh - Dromineer - Garrykennedy - Killaloe and Ballina: North South link that connects a Gateway, two Hubs and three Destination Villages. This proposed service could potentially be made more efficient through the addition of 'Demand Responsive Transport' element, where a scheduled service would

follow the most direct route between Portumna, Nenagh and Killaloe/ Ballina.

3. Portumna - Mountshannon - Scariff - Tuamgraney - Killaloe: North South link that connects several hubs and villages to two major attractions.

It is suggested that if both proposed routes between Killaloe - Ballina and Portumna were implemented these should be timetabled at alternate times to achieve a higher frequency for the connection between Killaloe and Ballina and Portumna (as passengers making this connection would be able to use either route).

6.7.5 Development of a Shannon Discovery Bus Route

A further option to enhance connectivity along the Shannon could be to develop a dedicated **Shannon Discovery Bus** route from Limerick to Boyle/ Carrick on Shannon, connecting up as many of the major attractions and Shannon destination gateways, hubs, towns and villages within the region as possible (see Figure 21 - suggested route only).

Analysis of visitor numbers at major attractions, accommodation bookings and other performance criteria could be used to identify if and when such a service might be viable.

As a trail-support service, this could run during the high summer season when visitor numbers are likely to be higher. A suggested route for this service is shown Figure 21, which could be piloted during the Summer season and rolled out if successful. Further discussion with transport service providers and tour operators will be required to establish the commercial viability of the route, targeting differing tourism segments, over the timeframe of the Masterplan.

Key

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Shannon Destination Towns: | Cruise hire hubs |
| Gateways Towns | Bus Route (proposed) |
| Hub Towns | Road |
| Towns | Canal |
| Villages | |

Figure 21 **Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route**



6.7.6 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI6 Shannon Connectivity

SI6.1 Encouraging Sustainable & Slow Travel

Implement multi-model slow and sustainable travel options throughout Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway over the lifetime of the masterplan.

Establish inter-agency monitoring programme of traffic flows.

Encourage On-Water slow travel links within & between Discovery Zones.

SI6.2 Priority Walking and Cycling Trails Network

Assess the technical and environmental feasibility of developing the priority walking and cycling trails identified in the Masterplan. Provide accessible and safe links from Shannon into hinterlands, with access to peatways and natural environments.

Develop 'trails of scale' that will direct visitors into the heart of the Shannon, with immersive experience of nature and longer dwell.

SI6.3 Enhancement of Public Transport Links

Identify, with the NTA and LCTU, if existing Bus Eireann Regional and local link services can be enhanced during peak visitor period. Provide easily accessible and timely information on Shannon transport options.

SI6.4 Improving Local Link Routes

Consider enhanced Local Link routes during peak visitor season

Establish the feasibility of developing new Local Link services in collaboration with the NTA and LTCUs.

SI6.5 Development of a Shannon Discovery Bus Route

Consider the feasibility of a Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route by 2025, once visitor numbers, attractions and accommodation have shown a measurable increase.

SI7

6.8 Strategic Initiative 7: Building Enterprise & Community Networks

Consultation with, and buy-in from, local enterprises and communities is a core principle of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan. There is a substantial enterprise base along the Shannon, providing angling, cycling, walking, hiking, cruising, boating, yoga, spa and other activities. There is also an array of food and drink producers, local markets, cafés, arts centres and waterside traditional pubs, offering an authentic expression of rural Ireland's food and drinks, music and artistic culture. There is very significant potential to create a world class tourism destination by building the networking capacity of enterprises and communities to deliver outstanding Shannon-themed activities and experiences.

In recognition of the potential to build a world class tourism destination, it is proposed to build a tri-partite Shannon network capacity to deliver outstanding visitor experiences and opportunities to meet local people:



Creating tourism networks: DZ1, DZ2, DZ3, commercially driven networks within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands



Building the Shannon 100 Enterprise Network: innovative themed experience network along the waterways



Building the Shannon community network: supporting communities to build memorable experiences

6.8.1 Creating Tourism Networks

The identification of three **Discovery Zones** along the Shannon as part of this Masterplan creates the opportunity to support the zones with the establishment of highly effective tourism networks. These will be commercially driven and comprised of the key tourism business and other stakeholders in each zone, with a private sector Chairperson and support from the Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland.

In order to embed the Shannon with the *Hidden Heartlands* region, the three networks will extend beyond the Shannon Corridor and embrace the potential of the wider region. These zonal tourism networks should be established as early as possible following the publication of this Masterplan. A tourism development support programme will be delivered for each of the networks.

The tourism networks will support existing initiatives, providing a strong commercial focus to emerging contextual developments across the region, while reporting to the overarching governance structure for *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*.

6.8.2 Building the Shannon 100 Enterprise Network

An integrated network of enterprises could be a catalyst for a step-change in experience development, that will attract and retain visitors within the Shannon region. It is recommended to develop a trade network of 100 ambitious tourism operators, that will be innovative, self-confident and synergetic. The network will be sourced from among top operators in each of the Discovery Zones along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway corridors (the '**Shannon 100**'). Selected operators should be invited to apply to participate, based on agreed objectives, work programme and goals.

Despite the current enterprise base, many service providers have not considered the potential of the Shannon to operate as a single, integrated destination. The Shannon 100 network could usefully collaborate in specific activities such as Shannon experience development and delivery; cross-ticketing, discounting and cross-referrals

along the network; as well as joint promotion of the Shannon as an all-year-round, eco-friendly, 'slow adventure' destination (see also Section 6.6.1). Inter-linked networks within each Discovery Zone will support the overall delivery of the Masterplan.

This initiative will require a bespoke, professional network development programme, delivered in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices and/or the Institutes of Technology in Sligo, Athlone or Limerick, specialised in tourism development.

- Qualifying criteria to be developed to ensure participation of a variety of Shannon tourism operators;
- Initial selection/ invitation may be done through the County Tourism Officers or Local Enterprise Offices in association with Fáilte Ireland, as part of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* development programmes;
- Elements of the programme may be delivered through face-to-face modules for key elements, but including a 'virtual academy', with expert online trainers/mentors to facilitate the geographical spread.
- Certification and quality assurance will be required.
- Operators may be asked to co-fund their participation as the network programme strengthens.
- Accelerated linkages to upstream funding supports (e.g. capital, business development and marketing).

The first wave of Shannon 100 participants could work during the programme to develop collaborative experiences, assessing viability, design and delivery of key components, scheduling and pricing of each element of the experience. The consideration must be demand-focused (what will visitors need/ seek in future) as well as supply-focused (what can we do, deliver, sustain?). Potential *Shannon Experiences* emerged during the development of the thematic and experiential framework (see Chapter 4.2 above), some of which could be adapted to build the enterprise network (Table 9).

Table 9 **Sample Ideas for Thematic Shannon Experiences (from Thematic Consultations)**



Spirit of the Shannon* (Theme: **Timeless Shannon**)

Integrated guided boat-trips of the Shannon's spiritual and mythical heritage. Activities include visiting the monastic islands, learning stories of Saints Ciaran, Diarmuid and Brendan, the founders; a Viking plunder; all the while experiencing the wildlife and habitats up close through boating and walking. Stay locally and hear the stories that still resonate in popular culture.

*this concept could be linked to SMEs along the emerging Pilgrim Way concept on the Shannon Erne systems.



Shannon Greenway

(Theme: **Shannon Journeys and Adventures**)

Don't just look at the Shannon -get to touch, boat, taste, swim, live it! Dip in/ dip out - accessible to all. Guided access to local stories - sunken Guinness barges; Brian Ború and Viking invasions; paddle steamer to Williamstown; and then cycling, walking along the many trails; boardwalks at Killaloe, Acres Lake, Carrick on Shannon; forage and savour the food experiences - and all the rest!



Shannon Music Experience

(Theme: **Shannon Timeless, Whole River**)

Enjoy river- and lakeside activities at great local pubs/ bars and restaurants in local Shannon villages. Hear about history, folklore, fishing, wildlife, and sample the traditional music and songs along the Shannon as you voyage from place to place. Learn to understand the regional flavours of Irish traditional music.



Shannon Safari

(Theme: **Timeless, Natural Shannon**)

High-end quality experience; a voyage of discovery where people spend time on the water, enjoying nature, taking part in spiritual and mindful activities linked to art and heritage. The story of the Shannon is told through the people who live there - try painting, foraging, yoga in the wild, experience the dawn chorus or soaring eagles, photography or stargazing - all the while immersed in nature.

Shannon 100 will be an inclusive network, working with existing tourism networks and marketing bodies, contributing collectively to the promotion and development of the Shannon as a singular visitor destination.

6.8.3 Building a Shannon Community Network

The socio-economic development of the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway region is a core objective of the Tourism Masterplan. Communities are central to this reaching this objective and thus, consultation with, and support of, local communities and landowners will be critical in the delivery of this Masterplan.

There are many county-based community groups and networks in existence who are willing to support the building of the Shannon destination, while strengthening the delivery of compelling experiences. However, many community groups and individuals, while hugely knowledgeable about their own localities, have fragmentary knowledge of the heritage, stories, activities or attractions outside of their own 'place'. The creation of a 'Mighty Shannon' mentality where communities feel part of a 'greater whole', welcoming and directing visitors onwards within the region, will be critical in building a sustainable destination. Such a Shannon Community Network can be activated through three practical measures, presented below.

- (i) **Structured Networking Programme** – of study visits to bring interested Shannon community groups together, on field exchanges to build understanding and deep knowledge of activities, events and attractions up and down the Shannon, to signpost visitors to stay longer.
- (ii) **Community / Landowner Involvement in Thematic Trail Developments:** community collaboration in rural tourism development of 'trails of scale':

Examples for inclusion are landowners and communities to provide opportunities to explore nature and culture among expansive Shannon landscapes :

- revitalised *Beara Breifne Way*;
- the emerging *Pilgrim Way*²⁸; and
- planned 120km *Royal Canal-Lough Ree-National Cycleway Loop*²⁹.
- Opportunities may also arise to revitalise trails such as the historical *Humbert Way* in Leitrim.

(iii) Collaboration in developing Shannon

Experiences: effective consultation will be critical in delivering the aspiration of the Shannon Masterplan. Capacity building should be provided to the Community Network in collaboration with the Shannon 100 Enterprise network, to develop core elements of the emergent 'Shannon Experiences' (Section 6.8.1).

These three elements can be achieved by development supports and mentoring available through existing rural development programmes and measures, particularly the Rural Development Programme (RDP/ LEADER), POBAL, local authorities and Fáilte Ireland, working with the various community tourism, recreational and heritage networks that exist in the Shannon counties.

There are various resourcing measures that can support the building of Shannon-wide community networks including the Rural Regeneration Funds and the Town & Village Renewal Scheme. Ultimately the aim is that communities will be proactively engaged in welcoming and creating memorable place-based experiences for visitors to the region, coordinated by the proposed Tourism Networks in each Discovery Zone.

²⁸The "Pilgrim Way" examines the early Medieval Christian and Viking heritage of the Shannon and Erne rivers/lakes

²⁹Loop from Athlone in Discovery Zone 2 eastwards along the National Cycleway to Mullingar, whence it will loop back into Discovery Zone 1 along the Royal Canal to Ballymahon-Clondara, close to Centre Parcs. From Clondara, an inter-county walk-cycle route is planned southwards close to eastern Lough Ree back to Athlone.

6.8.4 Proposed Projects to support delivery of SI7 Shannon Networking

SI7.1 Create Tourism Network in each of 3 Discovery Zones

Establish a commercially driven Tourism Network in each Discovery Zone, comprising key tourism and development interests that reach into the wider Ireland's Hidden Heartland, with private sector Chairperson, in partnership with Local Authorities, FI and WI, to provide strategic direction and support to the enterprise and community networks.

Each network will be supported by a development and training programme.

SI7.2 Shannon 100 Enterprise Networking

Convene the Shannon 100 network – invite enterprises to enter a structured Shannon-wide programme aimed at building and delivering world-class thematic experiences.

Design a bespoke, development programme, delivered by an accredited training body.

Shannon 100 to develop a sustainability ethos and code of practice across the region.

Shannon 100 to define a series of collaborative Shannon Experiences

Inter-linked enterprise networks within each Discovery Zone will support the overall delivery of the Masterplan, including existing networks and marketing initiatives.

SI7.3 Shannon Community Networking

Establish Shannon Community Network to assist in building and delivery of Shannon experiences, working with existing networks where possible.

Align community groups and landowners with thematic Trails developments (working with existing rural development programmes and initiatives).

Provide capacity building & mentoring (with RDP/ LEADER) for Community Network to collaborate with Shannon 100 Enterprise developments.

Inter-linked community networks within each Discovery Zone will support the overall delivery of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan

7.0

Implementation of the Tourism Masterplan



The Shannon by evening

© Waterways Ireland

Delivery and implementation are critical elements of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan given the scale of the area. A governance structure and ten-year, costed action plan are proposed to guide the implementation and management of delivery, with tangible performance indices (KPIs).

7.1 Key Principles

To ensure the successful implementation of the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon, a series of key principles have been established to guide the implementation of the Action Plan (Section 7.6 below).

- ✓ All project proposals for the Shannon Tourism Masterplan must be seen in the context of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, the overarching strategic tourism proposition for the Irish midlands.
- ✓ The principles of responsible tourism, including consultation with local stakeholders and landowners, will be embedded in all strategic initiatives and actions, creating better places to live, work and visit.
- ✓ All projects will be 'on-message' with the Shannon Thematic & Experiential Framework and aligned to the broader objectives of the Masterplan.
- ✓ The Strategic Initiatives and related project proposals for the Discovery Zones will focus on differentiating the Shannon and set it apart from its competitors.
- ✓ All projects will aim to add value to the Shannon as a unique destination and provide a demonstrable link to either attracting greater visitor numbers and revenues; extending visitor dwell time (length of stay); extending the tourism season; or, developing a new or niche market.
- ✓ Commerciality will be a key consideration for many project proposals and the implementing partners will work to support innovative and sustainable projects that align with the aims of the Shannon Masterplan.

All projects must adhere to environmental management requirements set out in Section 7.2 below.

7.2 Environmental Management

The following environmental management requirements must be implemented over the course of the masterplan. These environmental management proposals are intended to secure the implementation of the recommendations identified as a result of the SEA process and the Habitats Directive Assessment. The requirements are that:

- ✓ All project proposals and other proposed plans, referred to in this Masterplan will need to take into account the requirements of the relevant environmental legislation and associated EU Directives such as SEA, EIA, Birds, Habitats, Floods and Water Framework directives, as appropriate. All projects should consider the need for project level environmental assessment. This will have implications for Part 8 arrangements and the consent process for 'small scale' development.
- ✓ Wastewater, surface water drainage and drinking water infrastructure must be in place prior to development.

Measures to protect the environment will be incorporated into design of projects to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites. These will include, but will not be limited to, measures such as those set out in:

- ✓ Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries During Construction Works In and Adjacent to Waters (IFI, 2016) and
- ✓ Environmental Good Practice on Site Guide (CIRIA, 2015)



Divers in boat in Dromineer.
© Fáilte Ireland

Irrespective of planning requirements, ecological assessment and, as appropriate, habitat and species surveys should be carried out for all projects or other means of implementing the objectives of the Tourism Masterplan.

The design of linkages, paths and cycleways must be prepared with the sensitivities of Natura 2000 sites and the broader ecological environment in mind. Any such proposal must consider the potential for increased disturbance of species, such as otter, due to any increase of human activities near watercourses. Paths and cycleways should be prepared with input from ecologists and planners to ensure there is no risk of adverse effect on Natura 2000 sites.

Lighting of buildings and features along watercourses will be avoided wherever possible. If lighting is required within the riparian zone or along the banks of a watercourse, it should be designed in consultation with an appropriately qualified ecologist.

Contractors appointed to undertake any construction works will be expected to provide site specific method statements detailing measures taken to protect the environment during all phases of works.

Addressing climate change will be a considerable challenge for all sectors in the coming decade. As a result, it is suggested that all new major tourism development incorporates a net zero-carbon approach.

In areas of potential flood risk, a flood risk assessment will be necessary. Vulnerable uses will not be appropriate in areas of high risk.

Site specific flood risk assessments will identify the constraints for consideration at the detailed design stage. Further consideration of the potential impact of climate change on all potential sources of flooding will also be provided.

7.3 Implementation Period

The Shannon Tourism Masterplan will operate for a ten-year period from 2020 to 2030.

7.4 Partnership Approach

The implementation of the Masterplan will be undertaken in a spirit of partnership among Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities, in collaboration with the statutory agencies, National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), Inland Fisheries of Ireland (IFI), the ESB, Bord na Móna and Coillte, and the private sector for key elements of the proposals.

Consultation with communities, landowners and enterprises will be critical in building partnerships and buy-in for key elements of the Masterplan.

7.5 Governance Structure

A **Shannon Tourism Steering Group (STSG)** will be established to provide overarching coordination and strategic direction to three **Discovery Zone Implementation Groups (DZIGs)** – see Figure 22.

Existing structures, both at the Strategic Group level and the sub-Regional level, will be examined and where practicable will be utilised and/or amended to form the Shannon Tourism Steering Group and the three Discovery Zone Implementation Groups.

While the DZIGs will work under the direction of the Steering Group, many of the decisions, depending on their nature, will be the responsibility of the Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and/or other state and statutory agencies working in a coordinated manner.

The DZIGs will be responsible for the implementation of the seven **Strategic Initiatives**. The relevant Local Authorities and Statutory Agencies will be critical in providing both advice and in delivery of key elements of those Initiatives.

The **tourism trade, artistic and community partners**, will also be critical actors in the Discovery Zones in the final delivery of compelling tourism experiences, linked to the Strategic Initiatives. Communities will be at the heart of the masterplan, providing the unique welcome and contacts with local culture that visitors enjoy so much.

7.5.1 Membership

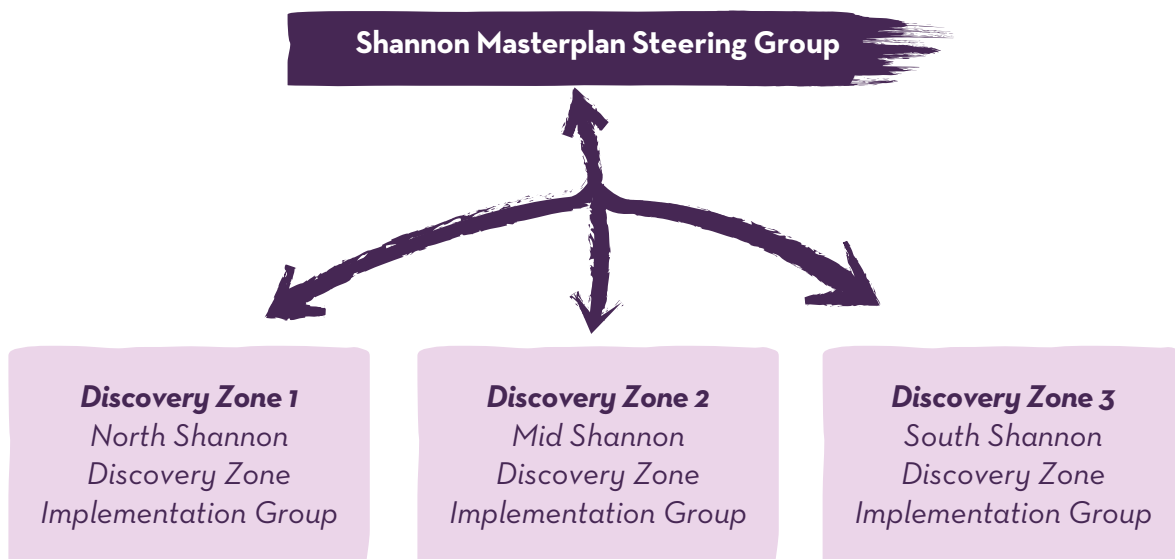
Membership of the Steering Group will comprise senior representatives of Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, the 10 Local Authorities, other stakeholders and industry representatives as required. The Group will be chaired by Waterways Ireland or Fáilte Ireland.

The Group will meet twice yearly and will review and monitor implementation of the Masterplan and will provide strategic direction and advice to the Discovery Zone Implementation Groups. The Steering Group will undertake a yearly review of the implementation of the Masterplan and will also undertake a Mid-Term Review of the Masterplan in Year 6 of its implementation.

Membership of the Discovery Zones will comprise relevant senior representatives of Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authorities as well as relevant public bodies/state agencies, industry representatives and other stakeholders. The DZIGs will be chaired by a Local Authority CEO.

The DZIGs will be responsible for the implementation of the Strategic Initiatives and associated Action Plan and will report progress to the Steering Group.

Figure 22 **Shannon Tourism Masterplan: Proposed Governance Structure**



Creeping seaward.
© Gabe9000c/Adobe

7.6 Action Plan

An integrated **Action Plan** is proposed to deliver the Strategic Initiatives and spatial framework of the Shannon Masterplan over the ten-year period from 2020 - 2030 (see Appendix 1).

The tabular action plan in Appendix 1 collates the recommendations to catalyse the development of an outstanding, world class destination in the Shannon Region.

Actions are presented in two categories:

1. Management and Governance
2. Strategic Initiatives

The Action Plan identifies the key partners and indicative timeline (colour coded) for each project action over the 10-year implementation period of the Masterplan, as well as Order of Magnitude Costings (OMC) prepared for key capital proposals only (see Appendix 1 and Table 10 below).

It is recommended that a Mid-Term review (in Yr 6) will assess the achievements against targets; challenges and consider changes that may have taken place in the legislative, fiscal or environmental spheres.

Table 10 **Summary of OMC Costings: Key Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) for Shannon**

TOURISM MASTER PLAN FOR THE SHANNON	OPEX/FEAS €
Strategic Initiative 1: Developing A Clear & Consistent Message	1,000,000
Strategic Initiative 2: Enhancing On-Water Visitor Experience	9,694,000
Strategic Initiative 3: Enhancing Waterside/ Hinterlands Experience	27,513,000
Strategic Initiative 4: Shannon Towns & Villages	3,761,000
Strategic Initiative 5: Enhancing & Protecting the Shannon Environment	15,844,000
Strategic Initiative 6: Improving Connectivity	18,644,000
Strategic Initiative 7: Building Enterprise & Community Networks	No CAPEX
OMC Costs: Tourism Master Plan for the Shannon (€)	76,456,000

7.7 Funding and Resourcing of the Masterplan

A number of specific capital projects within the Action Plan were costed on the basis of Order of Magnitude Costing (OMC). Additionally, several smaller proposals were allocated cost estimates. Itemised costings for key capital propositions are presented for each Strategic Initiative in the Action Plan in Appendix 1.

It is anticipated that an estimated €76.5 million will be required to deliver the key capital proposals to realise the ambition of the Masterplan over ten years (2020-2030) – see Table 10.

Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities will subsume the operational costs including administration; marketing & branding; time-based development costs; consultations and liaison that will be required as part of the implementation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan.

If significant additional current costs are required as part of the implementation of certain large capital projects, these may be sought separately from the various funding sources as appropriate. This will be ascertained on a case by case basis.

7.7.1 Potential Funding Sources

A number of public funding streams will be open for application (Table 11), through the agency of the Shannon Masterplan Steering Group (Figure 22) depending on the specific action to be delivered.

Multiple funding sources are opened annually, which if targeted and applied for collectively across the the discovery zones, could contribute to delivering the masterplan’s objectives. It is recommended to utilise a mix of all available funding sources, suited to specific projects/ sectors (tourism, heritage, marketing, enterprises networking, capacity building, community etc) across the Strategic Initiatives.

These will enable agencies, tourism enterprises and communities to proactively target social and economic development to contribute to the delivery of the vision and objectives of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan.

7.7.2 Consideration of Financial / Fiscal Incentives to Stimulate Investment

In addition to the above, consideration could be given to the use of incentives that are specifically designed to stimulate investment in the private sector, for some specific initiatives, for example:

- ✓ in the development of day-boat hire options;
- ✓ the greening and renewal of the cruise hire fleet;
- ✓ the development of water-based adventure and activity facilities; and
- ✓ the revitalisation of key heritage buildings along the Shannon and the Shannon Erne Waterway.

Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland will jointly examine a range of proposals in this regard in consultation with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, respectively.

Any proposals designed to stimulate investment must be firmly aligned with the requirements of the seven Strategic Initiatives in the Masterplan within the broader context of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands development strategy, and encapsulate the following features:

- Help to support relevant CAPEX recommendations within the Masterplan;
- Provide a vehicle to commission new projects;
- Provide a vehicle to address structural deficits, particularly in the Gateway Towns, Hub Towns and the Shannon Towns and Villages;

7.8 Key Performance Indices (KPIs)

The implementation and progress of the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Region will require to be monitored and adjusted as the timeframe of the plan rolls on. The following key performance indices (KPIs) have been developed to provide a monitoring framework to match the VICE objectives and strategic initiatives proposed in the plan. These will measure tangible socio-economic, environmental and economic gains, over the timeframe of the Masterplan from 2020-2030 (Table 12).

Table 11 Potential Sources of Funding for Implementation of Masterplan

TARGET OF FUNDING	POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FUNDING
Tourism Development	Fáilte Ireland – Capital Grants LEADER/ RDP 2021 – 2027
Rural Regeneration/Town & Village enhancement	Rural Regeneration Funds Town & Village Renewal Scheme Municipal grants LEADER/ RDP 2021 – 2027
Heritage	Heritage Council grants Dept Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht (Heritage Buildings) Built Heritage Investment Scheme Historic Structures Fund
Co-Funding Opportunities	Bord na Móna Coillte ESB IFI USEFE – Upper Shannon Future Economy Programme
Skills, Capacity Building & Training	Education & Training Boards (ETBs) Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) LEADER/ RDP 2021 – 2027
Community Development	Department of Rural and Community Development POBAL Local Authorities LEADER/ RDP 2021 – 2027 Community Enhancement programmes
Recreational Infrastructure	Rural Recreation Infrastructure Fund Local Authorities The Walks Scheme (in some counties) LEADER/ RDP 2021 – 2027
Marketing & Related	Fáilte Ireland Tourism NI Tourism Ireland (Support) LEADER/ RDP 2021 – 2027 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)
Cross Border Initiatives of scale:	Inter-Reg/ Transnational Programmes Any post-BREXIT border regional funding packages e.g. for LEADER/RDP transnational projects
EU Capital Financing	European Investment Bank (EIB)

As Shannon lies at the heart of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands region, the KPIs must be directly linked with its brand to ensure consistency in data capture; data management and interpretation across the region.

It will be necessary to establish a baseline and monitoring framework by working with Shannon and wider Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands trade networks to gather data from activity and service providers. Data may also be gathered and extrapolated from regional and national tourism performance figures.

Table 12 **Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Region**
- **Key Performance Indices (KPIs)**³⁰

Key Performance Indices vs. Objectives (VICE Model)	Masterplan Monitoring Framework (Indicators of data that will be collected annually/ bi-annually for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Shannon)	Delivery of Masterplan Strategic Initiatives
VISITOR (V)	• New accommodation / bed spaces to match demand • Numbers of visitors to the Blueways • Numbers of visitors participating in on-water and waterside activities. • Visitor satisfaction and no. repeat visits: visitor surveys to be carried out every 5 years. • Number of visitors undertaking walking, cycling during their stay. • Introduction of the Shannon Discovery Bus route	Enhanced services SI2 activated SI3 activated SI5 activated SI6 activated
INDUSTRY (I)	• Increase in visitor revenue to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands/Shannon; spend & yield per visitor by 5% pa (review annually). • A year on year increase in the number of boats in the cruise hire fleet to 2030. • A steady increase in the number of commercial boat licences issued. • Tailored enterprise network development programmes established by Fáilte Ireland. • The adoption and wide usage of the Shannon Interpretation Guidelines & Toolkit • 60 (3 X 20) guides in Shannon-themed Interpretation fully trained (Leader/FI/LEOs) by 2022; • 30 new themed experiences developed by 2023; • 20 new enterprises focused on thematic experiences by 2025.	Economic impacts SI2 activated SI3 activated SI1 activated SI7 activated
COMMUNITY (C)	• Community-based survey (every 3 years) to monitor perceptions of tourism contribution to life in local/rural communities. • Increase in direct employment in Shannon, particularly rural areas • A decrease in vacancy rates in Shannon Towns & Villages, contributing to vibrancy. • Shannon Community Network(s) activated and operational to support experiences • Number of participants in Community networking and capacity building events.	Measure socio-economic impacts SI4 activated SI7 activated

ENVIRONMENT

(E)

- Quality and range of statutorily protected areas along the Shannon
 - Loss of Habitats and Species
 - Occurrence of invasive species in the masterplan area
 - Adoption of ecotourism / environmental standards by Shannon 100 participants and Community Networks
 - Electrification of boats and supporting infrastructure;
 - Number of electric vehicles introduced and level of investment in supporting infrastructure
 - Biosecurity measures in place at key harbours/ marinas on Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway
 - Number of Local Link services and level of public transport availability across the masterplan area.
 - Number of visitors participating in walking and cycling activities
 - Number of historic properties in development and use
 - WFD status of surface and groundwater within the masterplan area
 - Number of new net zero carbon tourism developments in the masterplan area
- Please also refer to environmental monitoring measures introduced to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementation of the masterplan.

Enhanced Environment
SI5 activated
SI2 activated
SI6 activated
SI3/ SI4 activated

³⁰ Note: as Shannon lies at the heart of the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, KPIs will need to be directly linked to those of the Heartlands.

Appendices



Appendix 1

This Action Plan collates the recommendations to catalyse the development of an outstanding, world class destination in the Shannon Region. Relevant proposals will be subject to environmental assessment and adherence to the principles of sustainable access and design throughout the lifetime of the Masterplan.

Shannon Tourism Masterplan: Integrated Action Plan

- Actions are presented in the following categories:
1. Governance & Management for Implementation
 2. Strategic Initiatives.

The Action Plan identifies the indicative timeline (colour coded) for each project action over the 10-year implementation period of the Masterplan, as well as Order of Magnitude Costings (OMC) for key capital proposals only.

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)	
		GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF MASTERPLAN					Feasibility	
		Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10				
1.								
G1	Establish Shannon Tourism Steering Group* <i>*existing structures, at Strategic Group level and the sub Regional level, will where practicable be utilised/amended to form the Shannon Tourism Steering Group and the 3 Discovery Zone Implementation Groups.</i>							
G2	Establish three Discovery Zone Implementation Groups (DZIGs) to work under direction of Steering Group.							
G3	Financing of the Masterplan							

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)		
2.	SIGNATURE INITIATIVES FOR THE SHANNON								
Sh1	STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: SHANNON - DEVELOPING A CLEAR & CONSISTENT MESSAGE								
Sh1.1	Align the Vision for the Shannon with <i>Ireland's Hidden Heartlands</i>	Develop consistent communications and interpretation messaging to reflect the shared vision for the Shannon, aligned with that of IHH.							
		All Local Authorities and Statutory Authorities to embrace and reflect this shared tourism vision across print and digital media platforms.							
Sh1.2	Develop distinctive visual representation for the Shannon	Design a series of distinctive cascading logos that reflect the embedded and intertwined nature of <i>Ireland's Hidden Heartlands</i> , Shannon and its three Discovery Zones.							
Sh1.3		Shannon Integrated Interpretation & Design Guide	Develop Interpretation Strategy & Design Guide coordinate development of landscape-scale interpretation for the Shannon.						
Sh1.4	Interpretation Planning: Embed the Thematic & Experiential Framework	Develop Interpretation Plan aligned to the Strategy, and that of IHH.							
	Experience development with whole river focus	Use Shannon Themes and Inspirers to underpin all experience development across the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway corridor.							
Sh1.5	Develop a Shannon Visitor Experience & Interpretation Toolkit and proactively embed across the Shannon region.	• Create improved visitor information collateral (handbook/website/map/database) on Shannon experiences (activities, accommodation, food, music, events and festivals) • Explore the feasibility of creating a 'Rolling Wave' of festivals on land and water e.g. processional events, boat festivals, fishing festivals, Shannon Camino. • Create a Shannon Experience Passport and/or discount scheme.							
		• Support the development of improved visitor experiences, including improved visitor interpretation, with tourism enterprises • Support Shannon 100 network to develop co-ordinated approach to interpretation, promotion, support, training and accreditation. Create Shannon-wide interpretation interventions • Explore the potential of a Shannon Digital Information Portal for all information • Create a series of high-quality interpretive maps, widely available (print and digital)							

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE	Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility	Order of Magnitude Costing (€)
		• Create a series of art installations at strategic locations reflecting the character and story of the Shannon, e.g. A distinctive storytelling sculpture trail and signage along Shannon.					1,000,000
		Build support for high-quality, local, on-site interpretation • Provide training for local hosts and storytellers to implement the Toolkit					
		Provide training and supports for local providers , including: • Local guides, in interpretation of Shannon Themes & Inspirers; • Work with <i>Shannon 100 Enterprise Network</i> and the <i>Shannon Community Network</i> to expand capacity					
		Evaluate and review interpretation : monitor effectiveness and impact of interpretation on visitors' understanding of the Shannon; review regularly. • Create a Code of Conduct that encourages positive behaviours that reflect care for the Shannon's environments by both local people and visitors. • Carry out research and monitoring of visitor behaviours and motivations.					
Sh.6	Develop Shannon Environmental Code of Conduct, based on principles of 'Leave No Trace'	Scope the requirements for additional marketing resources to support the objectives of the masterplan, to be aligned with <i>Ireland's Hidden Heartlands'</i> strategies.					
Sh.7	Marketing Requirements, aligned with <i>Ireland's Hidden Heartlands</i>	• All Lower Shannon experience development initiatives around Lough Derg should be aligned to the VEDP currently in progress. • Support proposals for a network of camping/ RV sites, in suitable locations around Lough Derg. • Development of Dromineer Sailing Training Hub, as centre of excellence for sail training and national and international sailing events, through enhanced experience development. • Creation of linked boating experiences; support enterprises and clubs to deliver linked visitor experiences at destinations around the lake; • Build on stories such as Brian Ború; Iniscealtra and the pilgrim experience; and trade on the Mighty Shannon; that leverage existing strengths.					
DZ3.4	Link masterplan to Lough Derg Visitor Experience Development Plan (LDVEDP) proposals						

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE				Order of Magnitude Costing (€)	
		STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: ENHANCING THE ON-WATER VISITOR EXPERIENCE	Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility	
SI2							
SI2.1	Undertake a Techno-Economic Feasibility Study for Enhanced Cruising/ Boating On-Water Options	Feasibility study to enhance the on-water access options by day-boat / riverboat cruising and rejuvenation of cruise hire fleet, to include fiscal incentives, based on projected visitor growth				Feasibility study required	
SI2.2	Development of an additional Cruise Hire Hub(s) on Shannon	Increase spread of options for cruise experiences; assess technical, commercial and environmental feasibility including Tarmonbarry / Clondara, Killaloe, Athlone and Ballinamore.				Feasibility study required	
SI2.3	Undertake an assessment of Marina Capacity & Development	- Undertake a Technical Assessment of Marina capacity additional jetty space. Identify site specific options for redevelopment, including 1. Hodson Bay; 2. Connaught Harbour; 3. new Marina in Parteen/Clarisford; and, 4. Enhanced jetty capacity up-and down-stream of Clonmacnoise. - Review shore-side Service Block provision; assess use of Smart technologies to enhance service delivery and usage monitoring. Provide shoreside e-vehicle charging points.					7,500,000
SI2.4	Promote the extensive water-based Activities & Adventures along the Shannon	- Provide timely visitor information on full range of water-based activities available: where, when, how to get active in swimming, rowing, sailing, kayaking, canoeing, water skiing etc, within each of the Discovery Zones. - Use Shannon Portal (see SI1.5 above)					
SI2.5	Angling Development	- Develop improved networking and promotion of family-friendly activity zones (with Shannon 100 network – see SI7 below) - Work with IFI to develop specialist initiatives suited to needs of anglers. - Identify angling hubs in association with Inland Fisheries Ireland, linked to the Shannon Towns & Villages (see SI4 below). - Develop family friendly angling experiences at key locations which will support existing family-friendly experiences.					
SI2.6	Blueways development	Carry out accreditation of existing Shannon Blueways network. • Support promotion and optimisation of Blueways network, as part of SI6 Connectivity.					
SI2.7	Tranquillity Zones	- Pilot selected tranquillity zones on Lough Derg in short term, with a view to expansion to other areas - Develop protocols for identification and agreement of Tranquillity Zones.					14,000
SI2.8	Explore options for the development of small scale Accommodation	- Appropriate locations to be defined using a criteria-based approach, linked to Shannon Towns and Villages strategy. - Consider options for floating pods/ glamping / RV (subject to by-laws).					2,500,000

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE				Order of Magnitude Costing (€)	
		STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: ENHANCING THE WATERSIDE & HINTERLANDS VISITOR EXPERIENCE	Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility	
SI3							
SI3.1	Enhance the visitor experience of Harbour Amenities through a sustained investment programme: <i>Link to:</i> <i>Strategic Initiative 1 Clear Messaging</i> <i>Strategic Initiative 4 Shannon Towns & Villages</i>	Sustained investment in Harbour/ Marina waterside facilities to: - Enhance usage by visitors of waterfront public realm, amenities & onshore services; - Enhance BBQ, picnic and playground amenities at harboursides on public lands. - Use public infrastructure to stimulate harbourside enterprise & community use where feasible; - Create walk/cycle recreational linkages to settlements, leading to other attractions and things to see and do. - Provide serviced camping/ pod/ RV parking at harboursides (subject to by-laws) - Assess requirement for ‘smart’ harbourside services; amenity and use of smart technologies to monitor usage patterns - Assess needs; provide effective and sufficient pumping stations at key points along the Shannon navigations; ongoing activity.				Feasibility study required	
SI3.2	Enhanced Nature Viewing in Forests and Hinterlands of the Shannon	- Identify potential for enhanced family-friendly outdoor recreational amenities and nature experiences in Forest Parks that punctuate the Shannon Corridor. - Strengthen and promote access to nature along the <i>Beara Breifne Way</i>; <i>Strokestown to Clondara Famine Way</i>; and emerging <i>Pilgrim Way</i>; create opportunities for visitors to enjoy the spectacular scenery and nature in the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway hinterlands.					
SI3.3	Revitalisation of the Lesser Used Waterways	- Identify measures to increase visitor activity along the Shannon Erne Waterway; River Suck; Boyle Canal and Limerick Navigation; as well as boosting activity on the Royal and Grand Canals. - Refocus promotional efforts on enhanced visitor amenities; accommodation; recreational linkages to hinterland; public realm enhancements				Feasibility study required	
SI3.4	Feasibility Study to examine options: Reimagining Historic Buildings	- Feasibility Study to define appropriate locations and opportunities for refurbishment of historic Shannon buildings – subject to relevant conservation legislation, linked to Shannon Towns and Villages strategy. - Explore the use of incentives the stimulate investment as part of masterplan implementation.				Feasibility study required	Consider Investment Incentives

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE	Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility	Order of Magnitude Costing (€)
DZ1.1	Destination & Visitor Management Plan for the Shannon Pot	• Advance development proposals for Cavan Burren Park and the Shannon Pot (as per Cavan Co. Co. plans). • Enhance green linkages to the Cavan Burren and International Marble Arch-Cuilcagh Mountains UNESCO Geopark					1,000,000
DZ1.5	Enhancement of the Lough Key Forest Park experience –	• Support proposals for the enhancement of visitor experiences at Lough Key as contained in the Lough Key Tourism Development Plan • Enhance blue-green linkages to/from Boyle under provisions of Boyle 2040 strategic plan (see DZ1.3 in Strategic Initiative 6 below). • Consider options for green/blue connection from Lough Key through Knockvicar to Carrick on Shannon.				Underway	
DZ2.1	Development of a Visitor Management Plan for Clonmacnoise to include:	• Consideration of reconfigured access points and visitor facilities. • Consider development links with service hubs of Athlone, Shannonbridge, Shannon Harbour and Banagher. • Consider enhanced on-water berthage facilities at Banagher, Shannonbridge and Shannon Harbour.				Underway	
DZ2.2	Enhanced access, interpretation and experience of Rindoon Medieval Walled Town	• Consider options for an enhanced Visitor Experience based at Lecarrow and/ or Portrunny, to include access to Rindoon; and • Consider options for visitor access to Lough Ree Islands from Lecarrow/ Portrunny and Lanesborough/ Ballyleague/ Hodson Bay harbours (subj. to landowner agreements)				Feasibility study required	5,000,000
DZ2.4	Expanding the Lough Ree Experience	• Prepare a detailed Visitor Experience Development Plan (VEDP) for Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon area. • Continue to develop Athlone's waterfront amenities to build a critical mass of attractions and activities, linking the Glasson-Coosan-Wineport-Killinure-Hodson Bay activity-food nexus; • Completion of the Dublin to Galway National Cycleway and the new bridge that will deliver 'slow tourism' into the core of Athlone town and east-west linkages into DZ2; • Development of the planned cycleway south from Athlone to Clonmacnoise, linking the National Cycleway to the monastic complex; consider cycle links south to Shannonbridge; • Completion of the Athlone-Mullingar-Royal Canal circuit to deliver 'active in nature' experiences across the peatlands, directing visitors via Ballymahon-Clondara, thence to Portlick – Athlone.				Underway	

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE				Order of Magnitude Costing (€)		
		Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility	Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10
		• Develop an enhanced range of cruise options, boating and guided tours from Athlone waterfront linked to onshore attractions (islands, monastic sites, activity centres, bike tours) with visitor distribution through the wetlands and peatlands of the hinterland.						
DZ2.5	Improvement of the Visitor Centre at the Corlea Iron Age Trackway	• Prepare an improvement plan for the centre which would explore the expansion of its story and experience to include the Iron Age in Ireland'.				1,000,000		
DZ2.6	Surf in the Turf – Surf Wave Centre	• Prepare a Feasibility Study to explore the potential of developing Ireland's first artificial Surf Wave Centre on a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy.			Feasibility study required	10,000,000		
DZ3.1	Ardnacrusha - Redevelopment of Visitor Centre and Visitor Management Plan – Feasibility Study (subject to ESB approvals & collaboration)	Conduct feasibility study with partners to consider: • Provision of reconfigured visitor facilities, to enhance the visitor experience and to accommodate larger groups. • Assessment of transport options by land and water to and from site. • Options to consider on-water and beside-water development links with service hubs upstream and downstream, via Limerick, O'Brien's Bridge, Killaloe/ Ballina, Lough Derg.			Feasibility study required	3,000,000		
DZ3.2	Development of enhanced Castlelough & Portroe Lookout; Active Amenity Zone & Slow Travel Interchange	• Develop an amenity zone at Castlelough Bay & Forest with safe swimming/boating/ canoeing access; linked by trails to iconic Portroe Lookout; facilities to enhance visitor experience. • Develop enhanced links to Castlelough Woods onwards to Ballina/ Killaloe (south) and Garrykennedy / Dromineer (north) along Lough Derg Way.				6,413,265		
DZ3.4	Implementation of the Iniscealtra Visitor Management Plan	• Implement the recommendations of the VMP for Iniscealtra (Holy Island). In particular, the development of a Visitor Centre at Mountshannon, with guided access to the island, which will provide a springboard for a unique visitor experience in the East Clare corridor adjacent to the Shannon, from Killaloe, to Tuamgraney (St. Cronan's), Scariff and Mountshannon, and northwards towards Portumna. • Development of potential cross-Shannon visitor boating links from other villages around Lough Derg to Iniscealtra Visitor Centre and island experience.			Underway			
DZ3.5	Portumna Attractions – Integrated Tourism Development Plan	• Prepare an integrated tourism development plan incorporating Portumna Castle, Forest Park, Harbour, Friary and Portumna Town, to ensure that the visitor experience and yield is greater than the sum of the parts.			Tourism Plan			

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)
SI4	STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4 : SHANNON'S TOWNS & VILLAGES						
SI4.1	Shannon Hub Towns	• Embed the Hub towns at the heart of each Discovery Zone; • Invest in enhanced urban areas, layout and public realm to support full integration with the River Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway • Prepare Shannon-themed Tourism Plans for each of the hub towns (linked where possible to the preparation of the wider Visitor Experience Development Plans for each of the Discovery Zones) • Seek to expand the accommodation offering in line with the carrying capacity of the receiving environment and the resident population. • Diversification; promote other forms of tourism such as festivals, themed trails, business and culinary diversifications. • Incorporate natural Shannon elements with architectural, trees, cultural heritage & biodiversity along Shannon. • Undertake a review of the Food & Drink offering in each of the hub towns and make recommendations for improvements. • Develop Shannon Food Strategy for local and sustainable food production; work with farmers and other food producers. • Anchor & enhance linkages with key attractions and projects within the towns' relevant catchment and Discovery Zone.	Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility	
SI4.2	Shannon Towns	Focus on regeneration and enhancement of tourism amenities					
		• Undertake a detailed analysis at town level of tourism development opportunities within each identified settlement and identify incorporate recommendations within the relevant Discovery Zone Visitor Experience Development Plan. • Incorporate natural Shannon elements with architectural, trees, cultural heritage & biodiversity along Shannon.					

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)
SI4.3	Shannon Villages	Establish the need for improved interface between waterway and public realm; enhanced wayfinding; playground; BBQ facilities					3,761,000
		Assess the potential for provision of walks along rivers and lakes i.e. within a short distance from the mooring or jetty					
		Shannon-themed information with branded map boards at harbours showing walks, nature activities, attractions, points of interest.					
		Capitalise on the strength of food and drink offer in Villages					
		Facilitate the availability of berthage for visiting boats					
		Facilitate opportunities to enjoy fun activities beside- and on-water e.g. swimming, rowing, sailing, boating etc (see <i>Actions under SI2</i>).					
		- Accommodate Shannon-themed points of interest, including: - Shannon sculpture trail, greenways, cycle trails etc.					
SI4.4	Build a ‘Shannon wide’ Festivals & Events Calendar	Review Festival Programme with <i>Shannon 100</i> and <i>Community networks</i> to develop an ambitious, integrated ‘Shannon-wide’ programme, centred on water, culture, arts, foods, myths, music and activities that allow visitors to appreciate Shannon’s unique culture and heritage.					
		Integrate scheduling of events to prevent clashing; adjust programme to themes of Discovery Zones.					
		Ensure that Festivals Programme is executed as sustainably as possible: ‘green-proof’ proposals prior to commissioning.					
		Work with <i>Shannon 100</i> to professionalise, enhance and grow a series of international festivals delivering highest quality experiences.					

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)
SI5	STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5 - ENHANCING THE SHANNON ENVIRONMENT						
SI5.1	Development of an Eco-Tourism Destination	- Develop a practical Eco-Tourism Toolkit for the Shannon (<i>using FI Guidance</i>) to guide future enterprise and practice across the region. - Carry out Eco-Awareness training, with enterprise and community networks (see <i>SI5 Networking</i>); build consensus for ecologically sustainable destination and related measures. - Ensure highest standards of water stewardship. - Seek national and international award recognition for the destination and eco projects (target awards e.g. EU EDEN)					
	Development of Eco-Tourism Experiences	- Expand Eco-Tourism and slow tourism opportunities through exceptional wildlife and biodiversity experiences on rivers, lakes, forests, wetlands, peatlands, at a slower pace. - Develop an eco-themed niche accommodation focus, supported by appropriate industry training (Shannon 100) - Develop a Rewilding Plan in association with the appropriate stakeholders (incl. NPWS, Local Authorities, Bord na Mona, Waterways Ireland, etc.) to designate suitable areas for habitat regeneration, rewilding and visitor access to the post-production peatlands. - Develop an integrated recreational infrastructure of walking and cycling recreational trails using turbary tracks - Develop a range of eco-experiences and nature viewing points across the peatlands.					15,000,000
SI5.2	Destination Development and Rewilding Plan to develop access to Shannon Peatlands as well as rewilding, regeneration and recreational proposals	- Develop an Outdoor Discovery Zone focused on Shannon peatlands' environmental & industrial histories; recreational opportunities, guided tours; bog trains, etc. - Outdoor classroom experience/ Summer Schools to demonstrate climate change in action and mitigative rewilding measures; - Range of family fun 'bog snorkelling' or mud-slinging. - Creative 'slow' initiatives such as bog carvings and sculptures, photography, outdoor viewing zones; etc.				Feasibility study required	
SI5.3	UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree & Environs	Explore the potential for a UNESCO Biosphere Designation for Lough Ree and its environs with key partners, landowners, land managers.					

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)		
			Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility			
SI5.4	Biosecurity	- Design a viable model for delivery of a zonal Biosphere, in partnership with private landowners, land managers and public agencies. - Establish Biosecurity Standards to be used by all craft on the Shannon Navigation, SEW - Provide Biosecurity Facilities at Designated Entry points for entering craft on Shannon system - Monitoring & Evaluation over lifetime of masterplan							630,000
SI6	STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: SHANNON CONNECTIVITY								
SI6.1	Encouraging Sustainable and Slow Travel	- Implement multi-model and sustainable travel options throughout Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway over lifetime of masterplan - Establish inter-agency monitoring programme of traffic flows.							
SI6.2	Priority recreational walking/ cycling trails infrastructure using green-blue-peatway network throughout Shannon	- Assess feasibility of priority N-S/ E-W network of walking/cycling off-road trails along the Shannon; identify gaps; public lands; collaborations and expand to have fully integrated network - Undertake a Feasibility Study for the Development of ‘Shannon Greenway’ (DZ3) linking Limerick, via Clonlara, Ardnacrusha, O'Brien's Bridge, Killaloe/ Ballina, Tuamgraney and Scariff* - Utilise public lands (canals, forests, amenity zones) where possible. *Consider future links to Mountshannon, to Iniscealtra Visitor experience.					Feasibility study required	Feasibility study required	17,000,000
SI6.3	Explore options for enhanced Public Transport routes	Explore the enhancement of existing bus routes to better service visitors, with NTA/ Local Transport Coordination Units/ Bus Eireann.							
SI6.4	Explore options for enhanced Local Link and pilot routes	Explore potential for Local Link pilot model along N-S routes along Shannon during peak months – consider options for expansion to three routes as visitor numbers increase.							
SI6.5	Development of a Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route	Consider feasibility of a Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route by 2025 once visitor numbers have increased sufficiently to support it.							
DZ1.2		- Develop the Carrick-to-Leitrim Boardwalk; linking northwards to Acres Lake and Lough Allen. - Integrated blue and green linkages for Shannon-Erne Waterway – Lough Allen – Lough Key nexus - Develop greenway links from Boyle to Lough Key					Underway		2,000,000

No.	KEY ACTION	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE					Order of Magnitude Costing (€)			
		Y1-2	Y3-5	Y6-10	Feasibility					
DZ1	Delivery of long distance, themed trails to venture slowly through all Discovery Zones	• Deliver the <i>Beara Breifne Way</i> as vibrant driver of activity • Support development of the emergent spiritual <i>Pilgrim Way</i> along Shannon Erne • Revitalise <i>Humbert Trail</i> with links to Wild Atlantic Way in Mayo				Underway				
DZ2										
DZ3										
SI7	STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 7: SHANNON NETWORKING & ENTERPRISE									
SI7.1	Create Tourism Network in each of three Discovery Zones	• Establish a commercially focussed, cross-county Tourism Network in each Discovery Zone, linked to the wider Hidden Heartlands region and comprising key tourism interests. • Deliver a development programme for each of the three networks.								
SI7.2	Enterprise Networking: Convene the Shannon 100 Network	• Invite 100 enterprises to join ‘Shannon 100’ enterprise network to build and deliver world-class Shannon thematic experiences								
		• Design and deliver a development programme for the Shannon 100 network.								
		• Develop an integrated Sustainability ethos and code of practice, focused on food, nature, low impact activities across Shannon.								
SI7.3	Community Networking Convene the Shannon Community Network to support overall delivery of Tourism Masterplan	• Define collaborative <i>Shannon Experiences</i>, linked to thematic and experiential framework; & local strengths. Develop themed experiences, consider viability, scheduling and co-pricing.								
		• Invite interested community groups to register with Shannon Community Network to assist in building & delivery of memorable Shannon experiences (<i>with Shannon 100</i>). Deliver this in association with the Public Participation Networks in each Local Authority.								
		• Conduct study visits & exchanges for Shannon communities to build sustainability ethos and momentum of ‘One Shannon’.								
		• Align community groups with thematic trails developments: Beara Breifne Way; Pilgrim Way, Humbert and others emerging.								
		• Provide capacity building for Community Network to collaborate with Shannon 100 Enterprise Network, in developing ‘soft supports’ to build Shannon experiences.								

Appendix 2

Some Historic Shannon buildings in estate of Waterways Ireland

NAME OF PROPERTY, LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	
Albert Lockhouse, Drumsna, Co Roscommon	Located on the Jamestown Canal, passing an unnavigable section of the Shannon between Drumsna and Jamestown. The 2-bed property houses an office and welfare facilities, and planning permission has been granted to convert it to a residential/ holiday let, retaining an office for staff.	
Lock-Keeper's House, Clondara, Co. Longford	Clondara lies at the confluence of the Royal Canal and the River Shannon, 7 km west of Longford Town. The Lock House was built c.1760 to the design of Thomas Omer and is situated on the Camlin Loop. External refurbishment works to the property were undertaken in late 2018.	
Waterways Ireland Building, Athlone, Co Westmeath	Waterways Ireland owns a majestic site in Athlone overlooking the River Shannon and the town of Athlone. The site comprises administrative offices, lock gate controls, a store and a lock keepers house which is a protected structure	
Shannon Harbour, Co. Offaly	Waterways Ireland owns several historic buildings in Shannon Harbour, a picturesque village situated where the Grand Canal joins the Shannon at the mouth of the Brosna River. The portfolio includes the old Barracks and the historical Grand Hotel (pictured).	
Victoria Lock, Banagher, Co Offaly	The property is situated on a site of c. 0.5 acres at Clonahenogue, approx. 9 kms from Banagher. It is located on the River Shannon at the iconic Victoria Lock. The property is currently used as welfare facilities for Waterways Ireland staff.	
Bridge Operator's House, Portumna, Co. Galway	3-bed cottage located where the River Shannon enters Lough Derg, on the 5-span Portumna Bridge itself.	

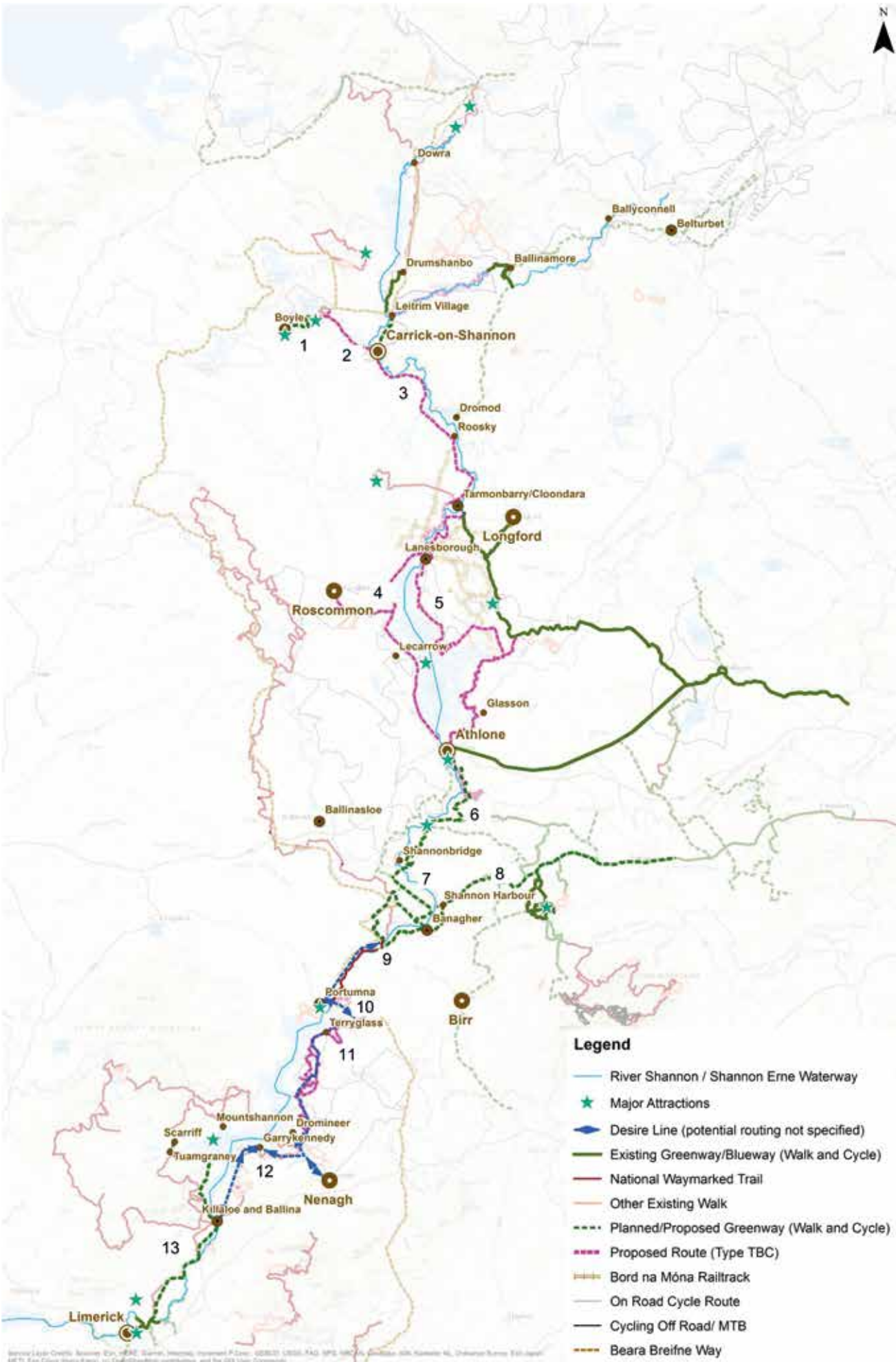
Appendix 3

Indicative List of Priority Shannon Trails for Development (non-exclusive)

Based on the assessment criteria outlined in **SI6 Connectivity, thirteen (13) priority trails** are recommended and described hereunder. The following priority trails generally follow a north-south alignment as this follows the course of the Shannon, providing an attractive route for visitors but also connecting the various east-west running railway lines in the Shannon Region. It should be noted that technical and environmental feasibility as well as cost have not been considered at this stage and these elements require further consideration. Route selection with respect to greenways, blueways and trails will consider environmental as well as technical and financial feasibility. Proposals will be the subject to the relevant environmental assessments at the planning consent stage.

- 1. Lough Key Forest Park to Boyle:** Roscommon County Council have an existing proposal for a Greenway on this route. The route would connect a Destination Hub (Boyle) and train station to an important visitor attraction.
- 2. Lough Key to Carrick on Shannon:** This route would connect a Destination Town (Carrick on Shannon) to a Hub (Boyle) and several visitor attractions. This is envisaged by Roscommon County Council as a longer-term proposal and requires further scoping.
- 3. Carrick on Shannon to Tarmonbarry/Clondara:** This connects a Destination Town with a train station (Carrick on Shannon) to a Hub and existing Greenway (the Royal Canal Greenway at Tarmonbarry/Clondara), via a Destination Village (Roosky). From Tarmonbarry/Clondara, there is also an existing Greenway that links to Longford and the train station there.
- 4. Tarmonbarry/Clondara to Athlone with spur to Roscommon:** The proposed route connects a Destination Town (Athlone) and a Gateway with a train station (Roscommon) to a Hub and existing Greenway (Tarmonbarry/Clondara), via the western shore of Lough Ree. As mentioned above, from Tarmonbarry/Clondara, there is also an existing Greenway that links to Longford and the train station. The route passes Rindoon, which is an important visitor attraction which has no public transport connectivity that could form part of a

- circular loop of Lough Ree. As Athlone is on the route of the Dublin to Galway Greenway (Euro Velo route), it has the potential to become a significant hub for cycle tourism.
- 5. Clondara to Athlone (eastern shore of Lough Ree):** This route takes in a significant number of key viewing points and scenic route sections as well as the Destination Village of Glasson. As mentioned, Athlone has the potential to become a significant hub for cycle tourism. A short spur could also be provided which would provide a second link to the Royal Canal Greenway at Ballymahon (in addition to Tarmonbarry).
- 6. Athlone to Shannonbridge:** This proposed connection has previously been highlighted in the Offaly Cycling Destination Network Plan under the phasing category of 'Long term Indicative Network'. The route takes in Clonmacnoise and a scenic viewpoint as well as Shannonbridge which is a Destination Village.
- 7. Shannonbridge to Shannon Harbour:** The Offaly Cycling Destination Network Plan proposes to link these two Destination Villages with an indirect route which crosses the River Shannon just south of Shannonbridge and again at Banagher. This route is somewhat circuitous, but the two river crossings would offer scenic views and a novel experience. If a more direct connection was considered desirable to improve north-south connectivity (e.g. shorter journey times to Clonmacnoise), a segregated cycle path parallel to the existing regional road between the two villages could also be considered.
- 8. Lough Boora Discovery Park to Banagher:** A section of the Grand Canal Greenway from Tullamore to Lough Boora Discovery Park is expected to be completed this year. Completing the Greenway to Shannon Harbour and providing a further link to Banagher would significantly improve the access to Lough Boora Discovery Park for visitors to Shannon Harbour and Banagher travelling without a car and would also provide a viable route between these destinations and Tullamore, which has good rail connectivity. This connection is highlighted as part of the 'Core Network' in the Offaly Cycling Destination Plan.



Appendix 4

Suggested interpretation media for the Shannon

9. The Hymany Way, a National Waymarked Trail, and part of the Beara Breifne Way, follows the west bank of the River Shannon north of Portumna, before diverging towards Clonfert after Meelick (on the opposite side of the River from Victoria Lock). Most of the trail in this section is currently described as ‘Rough Path’/‘No Path’ and therefore further analysis is required with regard to the feasibility of creating a more accessible trail suitable for cycling as well as easier walking. *The Offaly Cycling Destination Network Plan* includes a route to Victoria Lock on the east side of the River Shannon and a crossing of the River Shannon at Victoria Lock – the planned footbridge at this location would facilitate combining these links. If this is not feasible, a route from Portumna should remain on the west side of the River Shannon as far as Banagher and the link between Banagher and Victoria Lock would reduce in priority.

10. Portumna- Lorrha – Terryglass: The provision of safe, direct and scenic routes for walking and cycling between these destinations, linking Hymany Way and Ormond Way, could create significant opportunities for ‘multi-modal’ travel where walking and/or cycling is combined with on-water travel (e.g. using a different mode for the return portion of a journey). Portumna and Carrigahorig are currently linked by a national secondary road (the N65) which does not have hard shoulders. It is recommended that safe cycling and walking facilities should be provided along this short 7km link in order to provide connectivity in the direction of Terryglass and other destinations on the eastern shore of Lough Derg. Further links could be developed eastwards to Birr, along the defunct Birr-Portumna railway in time.

11. Terryglass to Dromineer: This section forms the first part of a longer route on the eastern shore of Lough Derg connecting the hubs of Killaloe and Ballina and Portumna and several Destination Villages in between. It was not possible to establish any detail regarding existing proposals within this area, although a looped route is included within information received in GIS format from Tipperary County Council.

12. Dromineer to Killaloe and Ballina with spur to Nenagh: An upgrading of the Lough Derg Way to strengthen links from the Killaloe – Ballina hub through Castlelough Forest Park, Garrykennedy and Dromineer and that a link to Nenagh should also be provided in order to enhance connectivity with public transport. No specific existing proposals for this section have been outlined in information received to date.

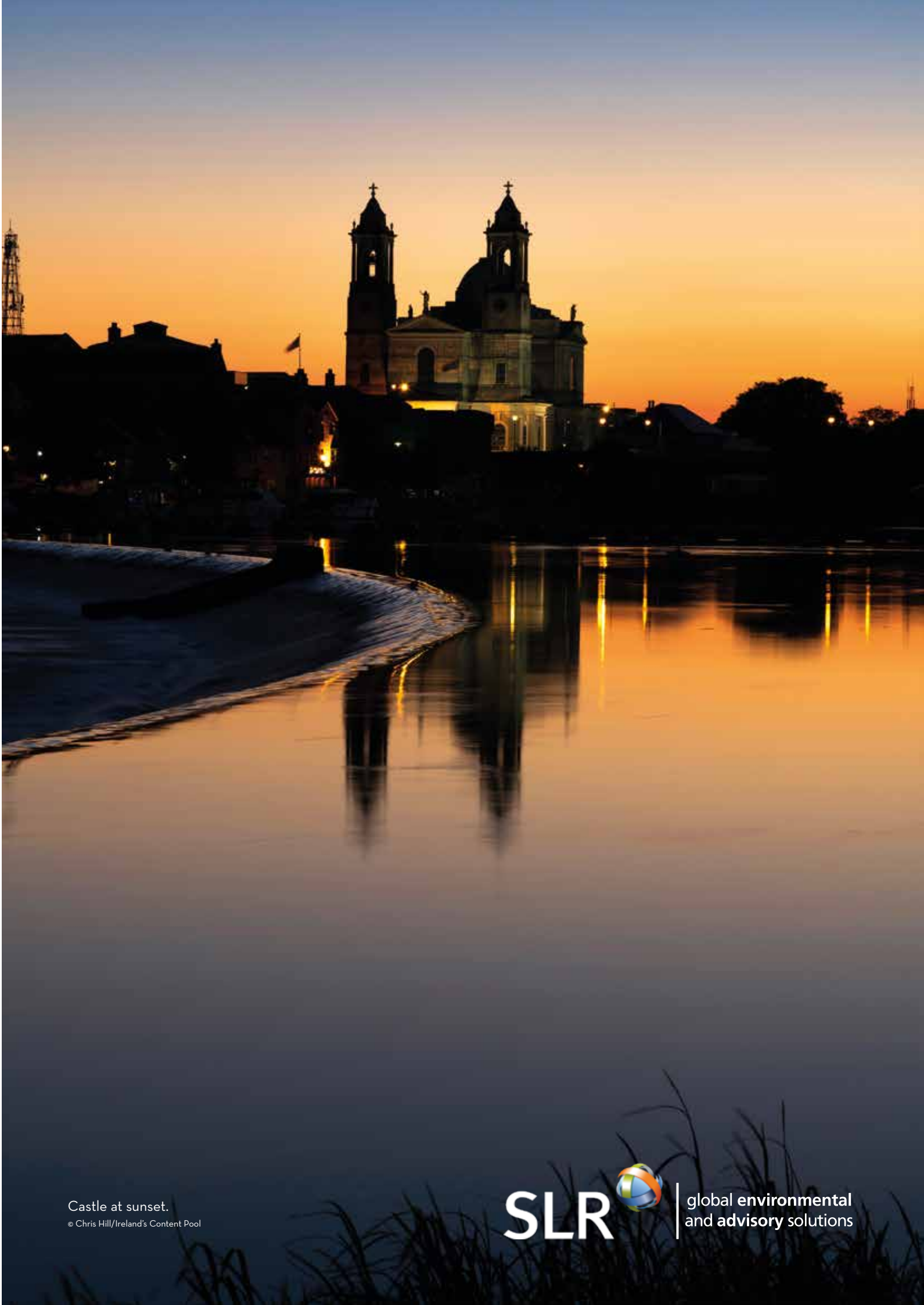
13. Shannon Greenway: walk-cycle greenway proposal being considered by Waterways Ireland and the local authorities in Counties Limerick and Clare. The proposed route connects Limerick, a Destination Town with very strong public transport connectivity, to Killaloe, Tuamgraney and Scariff, using publicly owned lands where possible. The proposed route encompasses the disused Errinagh Plassey Canal and the banks of the River Shannon, before tracking along the western shore of Lough Derg. It will provide a significant ‘green feeder route’ to the planned iconic Visitor Centre for the holy island of Inisceiltra at Mountshannon.

Over the lifetime of the Masterplan, there will be scope for other strategic linkages, which have already commenced (such as the Carrick on Shannon to Leitrim to Drumshanbo blueway) to be fully realised.

MEDIUM	RECOMMENDATION
Fixed interpretation media	
Outdoor Panels	• Outdoor panels should be used with caution, particularly in natural environments. They can be visually intrusive and require regular maintenance. They are not therefore an ideal medium in most parts of the rural Shannon. As far as possible the use of panels should be restricted to buildings and other built environments. • Panels are difficult to do well; panels on the Shannon should set high standards of modern, user-focussed design. • Panels will be particularly useful at arrival points (Destination Hub Towns and Villages) and where people naturally linger (quays, jetties etc.).
Indoor Panels and Displays	• Indoor displays work best when relatively small and focussed on a clear topic or story. • The age of the interpretive centre is over (except at sites of national or international significance such as Clonmacnoise). Internal panels and displays should be located where people go, rather than in dedicated spaces. • This means interpretation of the Shannon and its stories should appear (as it frequently does) in cafes, shops, bars, hotel lobbies, museums, information centres, B&Bs, bus-stops, inside boats etc..
Art Installations <i>Given the Strategic Initiative 5 environmental/ eco priorities of the Masterplan, it could be a requirement that artworks are built of natural materials that will weather over time. This could be interesting distinguishing feature of the Shannon.</i>	• Art installations include a range of media: sculpture, murals, mosaics, stained glass, soundscapes, projections etc. Interpretation is a creative communication process; artistic skills and approaches can be used to create variety to reach more people. • Linking with local artists and makers and involving them in delivering the interpretive themes can be a good way to create more unexpected and attractive interpretation. • Art installations can be evocative and so particularly useful where there is a desire to evoke atmosphere, emotions and reflections rather than simply to convey information. • Art installations can be less intrusive in a natural environment than traditional media like panels. Conversely, they can command more attention than a panel in a busy urban setting. • A series of sculptures or installations along the Shannon could be used to create a sense of the whole river, reflecting change and continuity.

MEDIUMRECOMMENDATION

Hand-held Interpretation Media	
Digital Media	• Digital media are increasingly popular, particularly for information, including orientation, that visitors will search for. • A digital portal offering well-organised, up-to-date and reliable information on where to go and what's on all along the Shannon will be valuable. • Digital media are often less successful at provoking visitors' interest in content they are not looking for. • Digital media are usually the best way of providing content in multiple languages, or for different levels of interest. • Digital media tend to work best for individuals rather than groups. • Barriers to using digital interpretation include: reluctance to use own phones/devices, fear of incurring charges, poor connectivity (or low expectations of connectivity) and, importantly for the Shannon, a perception that using a phone dilutes the quality of 'contact with nature'. • The best digital content is multi-media i.e. involves sound, images and words.
Publications	• Publications (leaflets, pamphlets, booklets etc.) remain important and popular for both interpretation and promotion. • Shannon-wide printed materials will be required to emphasise the whole-river identity and promote Shannon-wide events, festivals etc. • An Interpretive map for the Shannon featuring original artwork that can be made widely available is particularly important.
Face-to-face Interpretation	
Tour Guides and Activity Leaders Training in face-to-face Interpretation could be part of the Shannon 100 Network and the Community Network building (see Catalyst Initiative 5)	• This is probably the most important medium for communicating the stories and significance of the Shannon as a whole. • All people who have a hosting or guiding role on the Shannon also have a role in communicating about the stories and significance of the Shannon. • Networking will be important to agree the key messages, which should incorporate the interpretive themes. • The vision of having as many local guides as possible will require training and supports in interpretive guiding as well as other skills.
Performance	• Face to face interpretation should include a range of creative forms including: spoken word (story-telling and poetry), music, song, dance, puppetry, theatres. • All can be used to convey insights into the Shannon and its people in entertaining and evocative ways. • Linking with local performers and involving them in delivering the interpretive themes can be a good way to create more unexpected and attractive interpretation.





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TellTale

144



Alan Hill

Tourism Management Consultants

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

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